

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION FOR  
LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND  
PERCEPTION OF THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY IN ENGLISH  
HELD BY YEARS 1-4 SEMINARIANS AT ST. JOSEPH'S MAJOR  
SEMINARY YANGON, MYANMAR**

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**Abstract:** This quantitative study was intended to determine the relationship between motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and perception of the study of Theology in English at St. Joseph's Major Seminary in Yangon, Myanmar. A total population of 100 seminarians from Years 1, 2, 3 and 4, enrolled in the academic year 2019-2020, participated in this study. The research instruments used for data collection were the Questionnaire of Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (MLEFLQ) and the Perception of the Study of Theology in English Questionnaire (PSTEQ). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlational analysis (using Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple correlation coefficient) were performed on the collected data. The findings indicated that Years 1-4 seminarians, on average, had a high level of motivation for learning EFL, as well as a positive perception of the study of Theology in English. In relation to the three subscales comprising motivation for learning EFL (i.e., motivational intensity for learning EFL, desire to learn EFL, and attitude toward learning EFL), it was found the following: (a) the motivational intensity for learning EFL of Years 1-3 seminarians was high, whereas it was partially high for Year 4 seminarians; (b) the desire to learn EFL of Years 1-4 seminarians was high; and (c) the attitude toward learning EFL of Years 1-4 seminarians was positive. The results from the correlational analysis revealed the following: (a) for Year 1 seminarians, there was no significant relationship of motivation for learning EFL (in terms of its three comprising subscales) with perception of the study of Theology in English; (b) for Year 2 seminarians, there was a significant,

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strong multiple linear relationship of motivation for learning EFL (in terms of its three comprising subscales) with perception of the study of Theology in English; (c) for Year 3 seminarians, there was a significant, moderately strong multiple linear relationship of motivation for learning EFL (in terms of its three comprising subscales) with perception of the study of Theology in English; and (d) for Year 4 seminarians, there was a significant, weak linear relationship of desire to learn EFL with perception of the study of Theology in English. Based on the discussion of the findings, recommendations for action and further study are provided.

**Keywords:** Motivation; Perception; English as a Foreign Language; Theology; Seminarians; Correlational Study; Myanmar

### **Introduction**

Proficiency in English has become one of the challenges for Myanmar people to communicate and to interact with each other (Ulla, 2018). Nowadays, the English language is widely accepted as the global language for communication, particularly in ASEAN countries (Bolton, 2008). However, the majority of Myanmar students are still unable to translate English directly and to progress beyond the limit of a simple understanding (Sein, 2015). This represents a major concern for Myanmar's integration with the rest of the world, since language is viewed as a cognitive intermediary between transferring and sharing thoughts and feelings regarding ideas and concepts (Lindquist, MacCormack, & Shablack, 2015).

In the St. Joseph's Major Seminary, located in Yangon, Myanmar, seminarians study Theology using English as a medium of instruction. Those seminarians who pass all the required courses, such as "Christian values based on the Scriptures", will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Theology. The study of Theology in English represents a challenge for these seminarians. This challenge is augmented with the fact that some of the terminology used in the Catholic religion is not derived from English, which can further hinder their academic development progress.

According to Lalonde and Gardner (1984), motivation is a key element of mediation in language learning and proficiency. Moreover, Radovan and Makovec (2015) suggested that students' motivation for learning is highly correlated with their perception of the learning environment, including a feeling of joy, autonomy and support.

In order to further understand the association between motivation for learning and the perception of the learning environment held by seminarians at the St.

Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar, the researchers decided to investigate seminarians' motivation for learning EFL (in terms of motivational intensity for learning EFL, desire to learn EFL, and attitude toward learning EFL) in order to determine whether there was a significant correlation with their perceptions of the study of Theology in English.

### **Research Objectives**

This study was designed to achieve the following objectives.

1. To determine the level of Years 1-4 seminarians' motivation for learning English as a foreign language at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar.
  - 1.1. To determine the level of Years 1-4 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language at St. Joseph's Major Seminary Yangon, Myanmar.
  - 1.2. To determine the level of Years 1-4 seminarians' desire to learn English as a foreign language at St. Joseph's Major Seminary in Yangon, Myanmar.
  - 1.3. To determine the level of Years 1-4 seminarians' attitude toward learning English as a foreign language at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar.
2. To determine the level of Years 1-4 seminarians' perception of the study of Theology in English at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar.
3. To determine if there is a significant relationship between motivation for learning English as a foreign language and perception of the study of Theology in English held by Years 1-4 seminarians at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar.
4. To determine if there is a significant relationship between motivation for learning English as a foreign language (in terms of motivational intensity for learning EFL, desire to learn EFL, and attitude toward learning EFL) and perception of the study of Theology in English held by Years 1-4 seminarians at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research was based on the following theories: Gardner's (2010) socio-educational model of second language acquisition, and the theory of perceptual learning (Gibson, 2000, as cited in Adolph & Kretch, 2015).

*Gardner's (2010) Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition*  
 This theory is mostly concerned with the variables affecting different aspects of second language acquisition (SLA), such as integrativeness, attitude toward the learning situation, motivation, and language anxiety (Gardner, 1985, 2010). According to Gardner (2010), motivation influences affective and

cognitive characteristics of language learners. In this model, motivation is viewed as an amalgamation of effort: a positive attitude and willingness to succeed a satisfactory goal through a second or foreign learning process (Gardner, 1985). Thus, motivation is viewed as a driving force with the support of three elements: motivational intensity, desire to learn, and attitude toward the learning situation (Gardner, 2010).

*Motivational Intensity.* This refers to the effort a learner makes to learn materials and skills by fulfilling assignments, by looking for more opportunities in learning and doing extra activities, and by focusing on persistence and consistency.

*Desire to Learn.* This refers to a learner's orientation and willingness toward achieving proficiency in the language, striving for success, and the learning and mastery of challenging and novel tasks.

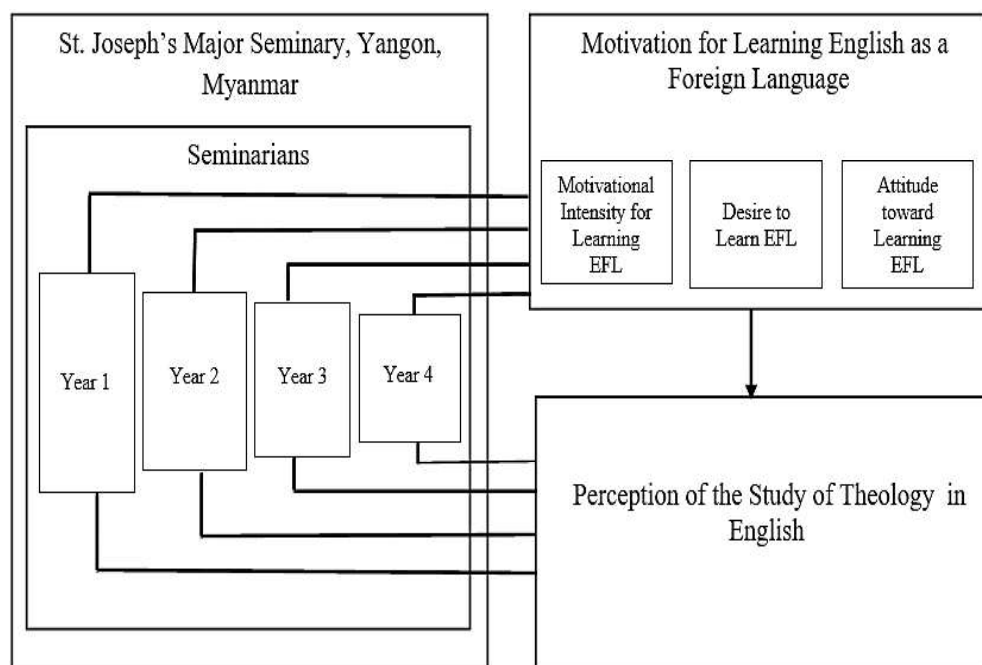
*Attitude Toward the Learning Situation.* This refers to the learner's predisposition and beliefs in relation to aspects associated with the immediate context in which the language is taught and learned.

*Theory of Perceptual Learning (Gibson, 2000, as cited in Adolph & Kretch, 2015)*

This theory suggests that cognitive processes such as remembering, reasoning, conceptualizing, and problem-solving are associated with, and influenced by, the individual's perceptions, and hence the activities carried out by any individual are guided by perceptual information. According to this theory, perceptions are sensory mechanisms through which humans receive and interpret information about their surrounding world, based mainly on three factors: subjective experience, needs and prior knowledge (Gibson, 2000, as cited in Adolph & Kretch, 2015). These factors support human beings to learn better in a particular environment.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is shown below.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.**

### Literature Review

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

Witzel (2009) conducted a study on the relationship of academic motivation and perceptions of learner-centered practices held by 732 Academy cadets in 23 core academic courses at the United States Air Force Academy. From this study, it was found that the perceptions of learner-centered practices were significantly correlated with academic motivation, yet the cadets perceived higher level of it in establishing relationship and encouragement from the Academy professors.

Another study conducted by Bong (2005), took 389 Korean high school girls to examine their levels of motivation and perceptions toward the change of the learning environment within the school year at a public high school in Seoul, South Korea. The result showed that perceptions toward the learning environment were significant positive predictors of academic motivation.

A more recent study developed by Sarwar et al. (2018) examined the attitude, perception, willingness, motivation and barriers to practice-based research among a sample of 141 pharmacists from 41 hospitals in Pakistan. The

findings revealed that all the variables at hand were statistically associated with each other. Moreover, it was found that the participants showed a positive attitude, good perception, increased motivation, and willingness toward the practice-based research.

## **Methodology/Procedure**

### *Population and Sample*

This research was conducted on a population sample of all the 100 Years 1-4 seminarians enrolled at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar, during the academic year of 2018-2019. From this sample, 18 seminarians were enrolled in Year 1, 22 were enrolled in Year 2, 27 were enrolled in Year 3, and 33 were enrolled in Year 4.

### *Research Instruments*

This study was conducted based on the following research instruments: the Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (MLEFLQ), and the Perception of the Study of Theology in English Questionnaire (PSTEQ). Both instruments were translated from English into Burmese, in order to help participants to have a deeper understanding of the provided questionnaires.

*Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (MLEFLQ).* This questionnaire was the result of adopting three subscales of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner, 2004): motivational intensity (10 items), desire to learn English (10 items), and attitude toward learning English (10 items) to measure the independent variable of motivation for learning English as a foreign language. Half of the items were phrased with a positive wording, while the other half were phrased using a negative wording. In order to standardize the directionality of the item interpretation, a reverse coding was performed for the analysis of the negatively worded items. A 6-point Likert response scale was used for this instrument, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .87, which is interpreted as good in reliability. However, Items 4 and 10 of motivational intensity subscale were removed to improve the reliability of the subscale.

*Perception of the Study of Theology in English Questionnaire (PSTEQ).* This questionnaire adopted 10 items from the Personalized Learning Environment Questionnaire (PLQ; Waldrup et al., 2014) to investigate the level of seminarians' perception toward the study of Theology in English. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *not sure*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). For this study, the Cronbach's

alpha coefficient of for the 10 selected items in the PSTEQ was .69, which is interpreted as acceptable.

### **Research Findings**

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and a statistical hypothesis testing (correlational analysis using Pearson's product moment correlation and multiple correlation coefficient) were used to analyze to analyze the collected data. The findings of each research objectives are summarized by the following sections.

#### *Research Objective 1*

Regarding this research objective, it was found that the levels of motivation for learning EFL of Years 1-4 seminarians at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar, on average, were high (on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being very high). The results for each group were as follows: for Year 1 seminarians,  $M = 4.71$  ( $SD = .62$ ); for Year 2 seminarians,  $M = 4.70$  ( $SD = .54$ ); for Year 3 seminarians,  $M = 4.88$  ( $SD = .46$ ); and for Year 4 seminarians,  $M = 4.70$  ( $SD = .47$ ).

#### *Research Objective 1.1*

Regarding this research objective, it was found that Years 1-3 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL was high (on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being very high; Year 1:  $M = 4.53$  [ $SD = 1.33$ ]; Year 2:  $M = 4.51$  [ $SD = 1.09$ ]; Year 3:  $M = 4.65$  [ $SD = 1.11$ ]), while Year 4 seminarians showed a moderately high motivational intensity for learning EFL,  $M = 4.34$  ( $SD = 1.11$ ).

#### *Research Objective 1.2*

The findings from the Research Objective 1.2 revealed that Years 1-4 seminarians' desire to learn EFL was high (on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being very high; Year 1:  $M = 4.62$  [ $SD = 1.39$ ]; Year 2:  $M = 4.57$  [ $SD = 1.17$ ]; Year 3:  $M = 4.83$  [ $SD = 1.06$ ]; Year 4:  $M = 4.59$  [ $SD = 1.21$ ]).

#### *Research Objective 1.3*

Regarding this research objective, it was found that the levels of attitude toward learning EFL of Years 1-4 seminarians, on average, were positive (on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being very positive; Year 1:  $M = 4.95$  [ $SD = 1.04$ ]; Year 2:  $M = 4.98$  [ $SD = .94$ ]; Year 3:  $M = 4.83$  [ $SD = 1.06$ ]; Year 4:  $M = 4.59$  [ $SD = 1.21$ ]).

#### *Research Objective 2*

Regarding this research objective, it was found that the levels of Years 1-4 seminarians' perception of the study of Theology in English at St. Joseph's

Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar, on average, were positive (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very positive; Year 1:  $M = 3.69$  [ $SD = .52$ ]; Year 2:  $M = 3.84$  [ $SD = .44$ ]; Year 3:  $M = 3.74$  [ $SD = .55$ ]; Year 4:  $M = 3.69$  [ $SD = .36$ ]).

### *Research Objective 3*

Regarding to this research objective, it was found that Years 1-3 seminarians' motivation for learning EFL and their perception of the study of Theology in English had a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship (Year 1:  $r = .48$ ,  $p = .042$ ; Year 2:  $r = .58$ ,  $p = .005$ ; Year 3:  $r = .50$ ,  $p = .008$ ). From these results, it was found that Years 1-3 seminarians' motivation for learning EFL explained between 23% to 34% of the total variance of their perception of the study of theology in English (Year 1 = 23%, Year 2 = 34%, Year 3 = 25%). However, in the case of Year 4 seminarians, no significant relationship was found between their motivation for learning EFL and their perception of the study of theology in English ( $r = .32$ ,  $p = .07$ ).

### *Research Objective 4*

The results indicated that there was a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship between Year 1 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL (MI) and their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .53$ ,  $r^2 = .28$ ,  $p = .023$ ). In addition, their desire to learn EFL (DL) had also a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship with their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .48$ ,  $r^2 = .23$ ,  $p = .042$ ). However, there was no significant relationship of attitude toward learning EFL (AL) with the perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .29$ ,  $p = .246$ ). Furthermore, there was no significant multiple correlation between the seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL and desire to learn EFL with the perception of the study of Theology in English,  $R = .55$ ,  $F(2, 15) = 3.303$ ,  $p = .065$ . Thus, Year 1 seminarians' perception of the study of theology in English was not significantly determined by the combination of their MI and DL.

It was also found that there was a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship between Year 2 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL and perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .54$ ,  $r^2 = .29$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Additionally, their attitude toward learning EFL was significantly, strongly and positively correlated with their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .61$ ,  $r^2 = .37$ ,  $p = .003$ ). On the one hand, there was no significant relationship between their desire to learn EFL and perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .40$ ,  $p = .067$ ). However, there was a significant, strong multiple correlation between the combination of motivational intensity for learning EFL and attitude toward learning EFL and



the dependent variable (perception of the study of Theology in English),  $R = .65$ ,  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F(2, 19) = 6.90$ ,  $p = .006$ . Therefore, 42% of the Year 2 seminarians' perception of the study of theology in English was significantly determined by the combination of their MI and AL.

Furthermore, the results indicated that there was a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship between Year 3 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL and their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .41$ ,  $r^2 = .17$ ,  $p = .036$ ). Moreover, their desire to learn EFL had a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship with their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .40$ ,  $r^2 = .16$ ,  $p = .037$ ). Besides, there was also a significant, moderately strong and positive relationship between their attitude toward learning EFL and their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .51$ ,  $r^2 = .26$ ,  $p = .007$ ). From the correlational analysis, it was found a significant, moderately strong multiple correlation between the combination of the independent variables (MI, DL and AL) and the dependent variable (perception of the study of Theology in English),  $R = .58$ ,  $R^2 = .34$ ,  $F(3, 23) = 3.83$ ,  $p = .023$ . Thus, 34% of the Year 3 seminarians' perception of the study of theology in English was significantly determined by the combination of their MI, DL and AL.

Finally, it was found that there was a significant, weak, and positive relationship between Year 4 seminarians' desire to learn EFL and their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .39$ ,  $r^2 = .15$ ,  $p = .027$ ). However, there was no significant relationship of their motivational intensity for learning EFL and perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .07$ ,  $p = .720$ ), as well as between their attitude toward learning EFL and their perception of the study of Theology in English ( $r = .27$ ,  $p = .123$ ). Therefore, Year 4 seminarians' perception of the study of theology in English was not significantly determined by any multiple combination of the scales comprising their motivation for learning EFL. However, 15% of the Year 4 seminarians' perception of the study of theology in English was significantly determined by their DL.

## Discussion

In this section, the findings obtained from the present study are discussed, placing such findings in context with previous studies. The discussion is presented and organized by variables.

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

The findings from the current study suggest that Years 1-4 seminarians, on average, have a high willingness to learn English and to invest effort and

energy in achieving the goals related to learning English language. This is consistent with the results reported by Siphora and Lynch (2019), who found on 215 students at Nelson English Language Center, Yangon, Myanmar, that Myanmar students at tertiary education were highly motivated for learning EFL, and hence had a high willingness to learn EFL.

*Motivational Intensity for Learning English as a Foreign Language.* According to Sein (2015), many students in Myanmar devote most of their effort in learning English, much more than other subjects, by attending additional classes and doing assignments. In a similar manner, the results from this study showed that, on average, Years 1-3 seminarians' effort and enthusiasm to learn EFL was high, whereas for Year 4 seminarians was moderately high. This implies that the amount of effort devoted by the participants of this study to learn English is either high (Years 1-3 seminarians) or moderately high (Year 4 seminarians).

*Desire to Learn English as a Foreign Language.* These findings also suggest that, on average, Years 1-4 seminarians have a strong orientation and willingness toward reaching EFL learning goals. This result is in line with the one reported by Gardner (1985), who stated that students who have a strong desire to learn (i.e., with a strong orientation and willingness toward achieving proficiency in the language) put more effort (i.e., have high levels of motivational intensity) and pay more attention to learn the language.

*Attitude Toward Learning English as a Foreign Language.* The findings suggest that, on average, Years 1-4 seminarians have a positive predisposition and positive beliefs in relation to aspects associated with their EFL learning context. This result is in line with Thant (2017), who conducted research on 119 Grade 9 students in Myanmar, and found that the participants had a positive attitude toward learning EFL, and hence a positive predisposition and positive beliefs regarding learning EFL.

#### *Perception of the Study of Theology in English*

The research findings suggested that Years 1-4 seminarians had a positive interpretation of the environmental information regarding the study of theology in English at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, in accordance with their subjective experience, needs and prior knowledge. This is in line with the results reported by Alaidarous and Mandini (2016), who found a positive perception of the learning environment held by Saudi EFL students, which could be affected by various factors, such as instructional, motivational, and learner-related variables. Thus, their findings seem compatible with the ones obtained by this study, with Years 1-4 seminarians also having a positive

attitude toward learning EFL.

*Relationship Between Overall Motivation for Learning EFL and Perception of the Study of Theology in English*

In this study, it was found that Years 1-3 seminarians' perception of the learning environment being significantly correlated to their motivation for learning EFL. This is in line with the results obtained by Bong (2005) on 389 Korean high school girls at a public high school in Seoul, South Korea, which also revealed a positive relationship between the motivation and perceptions toward the change of the learning environment within the school year. Although the finding regarding Years 1-3 seminarians seems compatible with that of Bong (2005), the findings regarding Year 4 seminarians contradicted the one reported by that study.

*Relationship Between Motivation for Learning EFL (In Terms of Motivational Intensity for Learning EFL, Desire to Learn EFL and Attitude Toward Learning EFL) and Perception of the Study of Theology in English*

Based on the results of this study, it was found that Years 1, 2, and 3 seminarians' motivational intensity for learning EFL was significantly and positively related to their perception of the study of Theology in English. Thus, these seem consistent with Hayat et al. (2016)'s findings on 230 nursing students' perception toward the learning situation, which found it positively related to their academic motivation. However, the results of the Year 4 seminarians were contrary to that of the former three groups.

Furthermore, there was a significant and positive relationship between the desire to learn EFL and perception of the study of Theology in English of Years 2 and 3 seminarians. Thus, these seem consistent with the study developed by Ajam, Hemmatipoor and Ramhimi (2018) on 230 nursing and midwifery students, in which students' perception of the curriculum components were found to be significantly related to their desire to learn medical sciences. However, the outcome of Years 1 and 4 seminarians did not show a significant relationship between these two variables.

Moreover, it was found that Years 2 and 3 seminarians' attitude toward learning EFL was significantly and positively correlated with their perception of the study of Theology in English. Similarly, Almisad (2015) found that 171 English language and engineering students' perception toward the effectiveness of short message service (SMS) was significantly strong and positively related to their attitude toward the use of SMS in education. However, Years 1 and 4 seminarians' attitudes towards learning EFL did not have a significant relationship with their perception of the study of Theology

in English.

The finding of Years 2 and 3 seminarians' perception of the learning environment being significantly correlated to a combination of the scales comprising their motivation for learning EFL is aligned with Sarwar et al. (2018), who reported that the perception of the learning environment was directly and strongly determined by the combination of attitude, motivation and willingness toward the practice-based research. There was no significant multiple correlation in the cases of Years 1 and 4 seminarians.

In summary, in the current study, it can be concluded that participants' perception of the study of Theology in English was strongly (for Year 2 seminarians) or moderately strongly (for Year 3 seminarians) influenced by a combination of the participants' motivational intensity for learning EFL and attitude toward learning EFL (for Year 2 seminarians) or motivational intensity for learning EFL, desire to learn EFL and attitude toward learning EFL (for Year 3 seminarians). From this conclusion, the aforementioned combinations of variables can be considered to have a strong predictive power for seminarians' perception of the study of Theology in English.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations of the current study are intended to benefit the seminarians, the professors, as well as the future researchers.

#### *Recommendations for Seminarians*

This study may help to lead the seminarians to be aware of their weak and strong points in the study of Theology in English from their own perspective. For example, Year 4 seminarians' motivational intensity was found to be partially high, and their overall motivation for learning EFL was not significantly related to their perception of the study of Theology in English. Thus, this might be of help for the seminarians to understand why they succeed or fail in the study of Theology in English. With a better understanding of the situation, they will be able to make changes in order to increase their motivation for learning EFL and then develop a more positive perception toward the study of Theology in English.

#### *Recommendation for Professors*

It is true that professors play a key role as facilitators to create a better environment for the improvement of the students' motivation in the learning process. In order to achieve this end, thus, they should be able to determine how students perceive the learning environment and consider novel ways and means that could foster a more positive perception of the study of Theology in

English by the seminarians (e.g., the methods of teaching, curriculum and/or the classroom environment). The most crucial challenge could be to move from a teacher-centered teaching style to a learner-centered style. By changing from the former to the latter, it is believed that students could be more motivated and have a more positive perception in relation to the teaching-learning process of actively and effectively studying Theology in English.

#### *Recommendations for Future Researchers*

This study was meant to investigate the relationship between motivation for learning EFL and perception of the study of Theology in English held by Years 1-4 seminarians at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Yangon, Myanmar. The results showed that only 15% to 42% of the variance of seminarians' perception of the study of Theology in English are explained by their motivation for learning EFL (in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn and attitude toward learning EFL). Therefore, future researchers should strive to use additional variables that has been proven to influence students' perception of the learning environment, such as self-efficacy, teacher effectiveness and language anxiety (Gardner, 2010). By conducting research on different EFL contexts and using additional variables, future researchers could have a better understanding of what would impact on the learning process, as well as a fuller view of what would be more effective in equipping students to learn a second language.

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