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When the Learning Environment Becomes E-Learning: A Narrative Inquiry Into High School Honors Students' Motivation

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WHEN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT BECOMES E-LEARNING: A NARRATIVE
INQUIRY INTO HIGH SCHOOL HONORS STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Norris and Barbara, who loved, supported, and never gave up on me through the entire journey. I would not be where I am, or who I am today, if it were not for their prayers, guidance, and sacrifices through the years. Their encouragement, faith, and spiritual wisdom shone through as constant reminders to help give me strength when I needed it most; because I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 forever changed the landscape of the world, especially education. Due to the guidelines the pandemic caused, education abruptly moved the e-learning setting in the Spring of 2020, when students and teachers had to quickly adjust to new methods of teaching and learning. As a result, students were bearing the responsibility for their own motivation for learning as they took on the of learning from home (Rake & Dunn, 2010, p. 79). Therefore, this study seeks to better understand four high school honors students changes in motivation as the school environment changed to e-learning, determine what internal and external motivations guided them, and how teachers could support them during their e-learning experience.

This study was conducted using a narrative inquiry method to understand the motivation of honors students when the school environment changed to e-learning. Self-Determination is the main theoretical lens through which the data is discussed, however, Social Constructivism, Flow Theory, and Social Presence Theory are also explained, as it relates to motivation, relationships, work ethic, and presence.

Study results provide insights to the researcher and others to benefit from or conduct research on student motivation in virtual settings.

Keywords: motivation, Self-Determination Theory, e-learning

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Motivation. Motivation can be seen as a drive or a need. Motivation is a theoretical construct to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior (Brophy, 1997, p. 3). Furthermore, Brophy (1997), explains that motives are hypothetical constructs that explain why people do what they do (p. 3). Motives are relatively general needs or desires that energize people to pursue purposeful action sequences; whereas goals and strategies used to achieve goals are more specific and are used to explain the direction and quality of action sequences in particular situations (Brophy, 1997, p. 3).

Motivation is a condition inside us that desires a change, either in the self or in the environment. There are many factors that may impact a person's motivation which may be intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation is powered by ones' personal beliefs, goals, and/or pleasure to obtain their specified goal. People that are intrinsically motivated accomplish goals and or tasks without external rewards. Extrinsic motivators are the outside forces that govern one to push towards a goal. Extrinsic motivators can be tangible or intangible. For people who are not intrinsically motivated, may rely on extrinsic factors to help them achieve.

What keeps one from losing momentum when reaching a goal he or she has set for him- or herself? No matter what the goal, one can be driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, or both, that may play a vital role in accomplishing the result.

To keep from losing momentum, even when the motivation is gone, determination has to take over if a goal is to be met. Determination, according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is the act of deciding definitely and firmly; firm or fixed intention to achieve a desired end. This age-old war between motivation and determination is often seen in conflict with one who is losing weight. One starts out with the motivation to lose weight, yet, as the newness of the motivation wears off, one must decide if the goal to lose weight outweighs the struggle or give up the fight and begin again another time. After the motivation wears off the determination to complete the commitment should then become the driving force to complete the goal that was started.

Now enters engagement. Engagement is the interest, involvement, or enthusiasm shown in an activity that is often predictor of success (Nayir, 2017, p. 60). This may suggest that even though people might be motivated to complete a task, it does not necessarily mean they have to be engaged, interested, or even enthusiastic about the task to complete it. On the other hand, one may be highly engaged, or involved in a task, but their motivation low, causing the task to remain incomplete.

Problem Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has forever reshaped the landscape of the things we do, including how we educate and learn. The World Health Organization (WHO) first learned of a new virus on December 31, 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of ‘viral pneumonia’ in Wuhan, People’s Republic of China (World Health Organization, 2020c). It was not until February 11, 2020, that WHO announced the official name for the disease that was causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020b).

A month after the official naming of the virus March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization characterized COVID-19 a pandemic.

In the past two weeks, the number of cases of COVID-19 outside China has increased 13-fold, and the number of affected countries has tripled. There are now more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people have lost their lives. Thousands more are fighting for their lives in hospitals. In the days and weeks, ahead, we expect to see the number of cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries climb even higher. WHO has been assessing this outbreak around the clock and we are deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction. We have never before seen a pandemic sparked by a coronavirus. This is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus. (World Health Organization, 2020a)

Due to the nature of the way the coronavirus spread, the illnesses, and the deaths, the CDC was strongly encouraging people to keep a distance of six feet apart, wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, use hand-sanitizer often, avoid touching the face with unclean hands, wear a mask, and when possible stay home. After the virus was declared a pandemic by WHO, the governing officials in each state were faced with decisions about keeping schools open for instruction. In South Carolina, South Carolina Superintendent of Education, Molly Spearman, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster, and their team of experts, made the decision on Sunday, March 15, 2020, to keep the school buildings closed for what would be the remainder of the school year. The school year would be taught through an e-learning environment for students across South Carolina.

E-Learning has become one of the primary means of learning for students across the United States. As a result, the education administration had to strategically plan how students would learn in an environment that is still engaging for all, while also safe. Because of this, students and teachers had to adjust to the new norms. Students especially had to find new ways to be motivated to learn, especially if school was taught in the e-learning environment, as it was when the outbreak of COVID-19 began.

Learning styles are different for all students. Some seem to thrive on their own, self-motivated to learn, while others need a little push to continue. Some might need face-to-face instruction, as is the norm in education. When we began e-learning, I expected some resistance from students and I also expected students to exceed expectations. However, I did not expect high-excelling students not to be as motivated as they normally would be in the traditional school setting. As the quarter went on, I noticed factors that could be causing the lack of motivation for some students, but I also noticed factors that allowed students to continue being motivated to continue their studies in their new, virtual class.

As previously noted, some studies have stressed the importance of studying the effects of e-learning and student motivation. However, through my findings, it seems that research is conducted mostly at the higher education level. Perhaps this is because there is more autonomy to use this learning style in higher education than at the K-12 level of education. Furthermore, the maturity level of those learning in higher education, to those in secondary education can also play a factor in why e-learning and the study of e-learning is used at this level. However, once e-learning became incorporated into the lives of younger minds, how it affects them, and how they view it, became important.

Through this study, the research will seek to explore the gaps identified in the aforementioned areas of research while trying to understand the attitudes and motivations of students when placed in a mandatory learning environment of e-learning.

Gopalan *et al.* (2017), states that motivation is a persuasive feeling that provides a degree of positivism to students to accomplish a task or activity to the end and succeed in it no matter how hard and tough it is (p. 1). With this motivation, students find ways to push through their anxiety and tension that the task may bring to mind, and still use positive motivation to complete the task (Gopalan *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). However, when negative motivation is present, students are motivated by fear of not being able to achieve the aimed outcome (Gopalan *et al.*, 2017, p. 2). Students motivated to learn find it within themselves to finish tasks without the need of outside forces to guide them. This is self-motivation.

Active and highly motivated students will spontaneously involve in activities without expecting any external rewards. Meanwhile to encourage low motivated students, external rewards are needed to convince students to participate in activities. (Gopalan *et al.*, 2017, p. 2)

As beforementioned, determination takes over when motivation has waned. Self-determination looks to self, either looking for internal or external factors to provide the motivation need to achieve goals.

During the recent events of school closings due to COVID-19, I found that students were either motivated to continue working on their school assignments, or they were not. COVID-19 caused teaching to move to e-learning style, and students were

required to learn material at home, through on-line instruction of their teacher. Students' motivation, or lack thereof, mirrored the words of Gopalan *et al* (2017),

Motivation is able to initiate success in our choices and at the same time lack of motivation can initiate a major barrier that prevents success. Due to lack of motivation, the feeling of frustration and annoyance can hinder productivity and wellbeing. There are several reasons that influence the motivation level in learning such as the ability to believe in the effort, and the unawareness of the worth and characteristic of the academic tasks. (p. 2)

During e-learning, students seemed to fall into two categories: students were producing great work, or students were falling behind, not completing assignments. Some students who were normally academically well-adjusted in school, had become students who were unsure, frustrated, and lacked the drive to continue their work. Where was the motivation to be successful? Once they were no longer in the physical school setting, what was it about the change that had caused the need for academic success to no longer matter?

Research by Rakes and Dunn (2010) sheds some light on why students may not be quite as motivated in the e-learning style of learning.

While motivation is critically important to student learning, lack of motivation is a frequent problem with students at all levels. All learning environments present challenges, but the online environments present unique challenges because students bear more responsibility for their own learning than in many traditional classes (p. 79).

Learning in the e-learning environment is now placed more on the learner, with encouragement from the educator. Of course, there were, and are, other factors in e-

learning that affected student motivation during e-learning such as access to technology or the ability to use technology.

In 2011, Maldonado *et al.*, stated that up to that point, students' motivation to learn had widely been studied in the traditional classroom setting, but not with the influences of technology on e-learning motivation (p. 68). In a previous study, it was also noted by Rovai *et al* (2007), that there needed to be more study on student motivation on distance learning (p. 414). As I have researched, it seems that most research has been conducted on higher education classrooms and e-learning settings. There may need to be an exploration of e-learning and student motivation in K-12 education, specifically at the secondary level, and that is what this study seeks to do.

Statement of Purpose for the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to explore how changing to the e-learning environment changed the motivation of honors students to complete school assignments. Specifically, there is a lack of research regarding the factors that may have impacted honors students' motivation to complete his/her required high school courses. Honors students have the academic knowledge to complete the work; however, many of them may have lacked motivation to push through to completion during the e-learning environment due to the pandemic.

Given that a pandemic of the magnitude of Covid-19 has not occurred in modern times, there is limited empirical research that identifies the support and motivating factors for high school students working in an e-learning environment due to a pandemic caused by COVID-19. This study also explores what instructional support is needed from the

teacher during e-learning and how it may or may not be the same as in the in-school setting.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study was the following:
How does changing to an e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments? In addition, other questions that followed were:

1. What external or internal factors influenced motivation to complete assignments during e-learning?
2. How can teachers change the structure of e-learning to better support student's motivation to complete assignments?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework allows the researcher to provide structure and rationale for the study. The theoretical framework consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergirds the researcher's thinking to the topic, as well as to concept definitions from the theory that are relevant to the researcher's topic (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 13). The framework provides insight into themes and theories related to student motivation associated with e-learning. This study provides the opportunity to examine a few different theories from various theorists. The Theory of Social Constructivism by Lev Vygotsky is the overarching theory of this study while the theories of Self-Determination and Social Presence Theory are considered by the researcher as subsets of Vygotskian constructivism. Self-Determination theory (SDT) was founded and elaborated by researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. Social Presence Theory (SPT) studied by social psychologists, John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie, examines the

important social factors in distance learning education, particularly those of the online environment. Psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi has researched in depth the Flow Theory. This theory, when studied through the lens of education, can provide insight into motivation when “flow” is present. This theory is being placed as a sub-theory of SDT. These are the four theories will provide the lens through which I will examine student motivation during the spring of 2020.

Methodology

The researcher examined the relevance of motivating factors for students in the e-learning environment. Specifically, there is a lack of information regarding the services, interventions, and support that were needed to help keep students motivated during e-learning. This study was conducted as an action research study. More specifically, a qualitative, narrative inquiry study was conducted in an attempt to understand students’ motivation to continue learning during a pandemic when the learning environment changed to e-learning. Riessman (2008) states that in narrative, a storyteller connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story (p. 3).

To collect the narratives, data was collected through an open-end survey, semi-structured interview, and group interview session. All data collected was collected electronically using Microsoft Teams.

Participants provided their consent to participate in the study before data was collected, and completed the survey first, followed by an interview, in which clarifying questions were asked, to provide clarity to survey responses. Responses to the survey and the group interview were analyzed to provide questions for the group interview

discussion. Participants then participated in the group interview discussion. The semi-structured interviews and the group interview were recorded and transcribed in order to be analyzed and coded to find emerging themes.

Participant Selection and Research Site

Participants at the time of this study were honors students eighteen years or older, who recently graduated from a public school in South Carolina. Since participants were each over the age of 18, no special, additional permissions were necessary. Students' identifications will remain anonymous.

These students were selected because they were former students in one of my high school honors mathematics classes and had recently experienced e-learning first during the pandemic. For courses taught in high schools in South Carolina Schools, students take courses that are tracked by their level. The levels are as follows from lowest to highest level of difficulty: College Prep, Honors, Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate. Their firsthand experiences would provide insight into their motivation during e-learning.

Source of Data Collection

The students identified for this research study are all honors students who graduated from high school at the end of the 2019-2020 school year and are now pursuing their post-secondary studies. The identified participants all attended classes in a high school in South Carolina. In this study, the researcher collected data from students through questionnaires and interviews. This qualitative study was designed to better understand the student's perception of the motivating factors or lack of motivating factors that helped them complete their high school courses while learning in the e-learning

environment. The researcher provided letters of consent to students to sign to verify their participation in the study. A request to conduct research was submitted to the University of South Carolina. The potential participants were selected from students that the researcher had previously taught in their senior year of high school.

Positionality

It is the obligation of the researcher to conduct the research in an ethical manner with permission from the appropriate authorities.

I approach this dissertation study while currently teaching mathematics in a public suburban high school in South Carolina for the past three and a half years, but a total of nine and a half years as a high school mathematics educator. My interest in conducting this research was piqued by my own struggle with my motivation to complete this dissertation, to find full engagement in it (flow), and to generate the self-determination to will it to completion. I continuously said I was determined to finish it, but there seemed to be many intrinsic and extrinsic obstacles that precluded my motivation.

In the Fall of 2017, I completed all coursework, and should have been at a place in the program to defend. However, I felt defeated, and it was unlike me to be defeated in my academics. A strong academic student, having not made less than an 'A' in any course since undergraduate school, I always saw myself as a motivated, ambitious student, extremely conscientious of my work, and completing tasks. But at the end of the 2017 school year, I transferred from one school to teach at another, that was when I lost momentum, and I could not seem to pick up where I left off. I saw my cohort eventually graduate, and I wondered if I could ever do the same.

I tried to pick up again, but I found other things to occupy my time, adding more to my plate—such as coaching high school tennis, which kept me from continuing to research. Then, once I gathered momentum again, I experienced the tragic loss of a student, and at that time, my dissertation chairperson was no longer with the department. I was assigned to someone new, and I felt a little wind gather to push me. Once yet again, I felt like I could not do it. I saw doctoral candidates in cohorts well behind my own begin, and graduate from the program; I could not understand how I, a go-getter, could be stuck. My mother was constantly on me, a few coworkers who knew I was working on theirs, were an encouragement, yet I continued to be stuck; I was greatly embarrassed. I felt like I was letting myself down, my mom down, and my dissertation chair down. I was desperate for help, but not sure how to get it, and when I did reach out, I was not sure how to use it.

Then, one day, COVID-19 happened, and the world seemed to stop, yet, in my mind, I felt it was also a whisper for me to take the opportunity to work—do some research. I was not sure how I would do it, but I knew I could get something down. The time spent away from school was longer than we all expected, and I found myself changing my topic again. In that time, I wondered how I could use time, the data, and the experience we were going through to my advance. I knew I was working harder than ever before as an educator through e-learning. I spoke to my new dissertation chairperson about the challenge of teaching in the new way, the challenge of motivating students who were already not motivated to learn, and the unexpected challenge of motivating students who were once motivated to learn. He made a comment that I had not thought yet, “They are having a problem much like you.” He was right; they were, and I

could relate. They were experiencing crises in their lives that were causing them to be unmotivated, lose concentration, lack focus, and not care about the outcome of what it would do to their grade. For me, I wondered what would happen if I did not finish, but I desperately wanted to, especially since I had finished the course work, but did not know how to pick myself up. My dissertation chairperson also made another thought-provoking statement—a metaphor. He likened my momentum to finish to a sailboat that is in water but cannot move forward because it had no wind in its sail. There is nothing wrong with it, but the person waits for it to move, to be taken to shore. There is no wind. What gets the boat to move? What outside motivation did I need to push me forward? What motivation did my students need, or will need to push them in the e-learning realm of learning? Obviously, we have self-motivation, but is it always enough to get us to shore, to the finish line, to keep the momentum strong?

Based on own struggle, I am paralleling my experience alongside that of my participants. My degree program was entirely on-line, and while, unlike my participants, I was not faced with any hardships while taking my class, I find that maybe some of my own motivational struggles at this point in my journey can be viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework of this study.

Definition of Terms

COVID-19: A disease caused by a new coronavirus, which has not been previously identified in humans. In most cases, COVID-19 causes mild symptoms including dry cough, tiredness and fever, aches and pains, nasal congestion, and sore throat. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell. Most recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out

of every 6 people who get COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and has difficulty breathing. (World Health Organization, 2020).

E-Learning: Courses that are specifically delivered via the internet to somewhere other than the classroom where the instructor is teaching (elearningNC, 2020).

High School: The educational setting in which students complete grades 9-12.

Honors student: Students who are identified in grades 1-12 as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require educational programming beyond that normally provided by the general school programming in order to achieve their potential (South Carolina State Board of Education, 2017, p. 2).

Momentum: The strength of a student's engagement with learning activities (Strahan, 2008, p. 4)

Motivation: Any internal process that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior. (Reeve, 2016, p. 31)

Pandemic: An event in which a disease spreads across several countries and affects a large number of people. (Centers for Disease and Control, 2020a)

Traditional Setting: K-12 educational classroom facility for students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the introduction of the research by identifying the problem statement and purpose of the study. The theoretical framework aided in theories behind the purpose of the study. This chapter also gives a brief overview of the methodology of this study. Chapter 2 explores the related literature focused on this study. Chapter 3 defines in depth the methodology. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the study with

detailed data, and Chapter 5 gives an overall discussion of the study in completion, the study's implications from its findings, and future research suggestions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in the previous chapter, this study examines student motivation during a period of e-learning through the lens of a lens of related theories of motivation. The events of COVID-19 forced students across the United States at every level of education to find the motivation to continue without the physical, in-person incentives on which they had previously relied. It brought to light challenges and showed where there were areas that needed to be improved and areas that were working well in education. However, because of this new, non-traditional way of teaching and learning, the self-determined efforts required of students have been greater than ever before, making their need for motivation and drive for learning even greater. If motivation is not there, it seems more likely a student will fall behind.

This study seeks to show how motivation to learn may or may not have changed for honors students since moving to an e-learning style of learning, as well as how teachers' instructional support to students may or may not change for students immersed in virtual learning. In this chapter I will discuss theories: Social Constructivism, Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and Social Presence Theory. This chapter will also examine other studies related to the topic of motivation in the e-learning environment and the chapter summary.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that explain the knowledge and understanding of the world that are developed jointly by individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 13). Social constructivism is influenced by Lev Vygotsky (1978), as he suggests that knowledge is constructed within social settings, internally analyzed, and once the knowledge makes sense, the learner is able to use it to create new knowledge. Vygotsky's main idea is that language is important for knowledge development as one internalizes, assimilates, and accommodates new information with existing knowledge, in what he calls the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, emphasis in the original)

In other words, in this zone, an individual has the ability to independently perform tasks in a specific range without the assistance of a teacher or peer, before the range reaches a point that assistance is needed to master a new skill. To extend this zone, whomever is providing them with the appropriate guidance to create new knowledge uses a process of scaffolding. Scaffolding is not a term used by Vygotsky's theory, but used to explain the metaphor of how someone is supporting another as they are building new knowledge, much like a scaffolding is a temporary support used for workers while building things. Scaffolding in education works the same. The teacher or peer is a temporary support,

helping the learner extend his/her zone of proximal development and when they have accomplished this task of developing new understanding, their assistance is removed. Once new knowledge is gained, the learner is once again capable of using their new knowledge to work independently.

Self-Determination Theory

Although the initial work leading to Self-determination (SDT) dates back to the 1970s and the first relatively comprehensive state of SDT appeared in the mid-1980s, it has been during the past decades that research on SDT has truly mushroomed (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 182).

Self-determination (SDT) is a broad theory of human personality and motivation concerned with how the individual interacts with and depends on the social environment. SDT defines intrinsic and several types of extrinsic motivation and outlines how these motivations influence situational responses in different domains, as well as social and cognitive development and personality. SDT is centered on basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and their necessary role in self-determined motivation, well-being, and growth.

(Legault, 2017, p. 1)

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 8). In other words, when one acts out of one's own interest, with or without outside forces influencing his or her choices. According to Ryan & Deci (2002), when autonomous, individuals experience their behavior as an expression of the self, such that, even when actions are influenced by outside sources, the actors concur

with those influences, feeling both initiative and value with regard to them (p. 8). Furthermore, Reeve (2002), studied the Self-Determination Theory in the educational setting. In his studies and research, it was concluded that 1) autonomously-motivated students thrive in educational settings, and 2) students benefit when teachers support their autonomy (Reeve, 2002, p. 183).

The first conclusion essentially means that the quality of a student's motivation explains part of why he or she achieves highly, enjoys school, prefers optimal challenges, and generates creative products. The second conclusion recognizes that the quality of a student's motivation depends, in part, on the quality of the student-teacher relationship. (Reeve, 2002, p. 183)

Essentially, the quality of a student's motivation is two-fold, the type of motivation a student has and the strength of the relationship between student and teacher, dictates their success in school.

In SDT, motivation is driven by either intrinsic or extrinsic forces. These motivations are based on the different reasons or goals that give reason to an action. The distinction between the two motivations is that *intrinsic motivation* refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, while *extrinsic motivation* refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). Intrinsic motivation comes from within, one's natural instincts to want to complete a task and the rewards that come with it. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside influences and is motivated by an external control. Intrinsic motivation is more controlled autonomously, allowing one the freedom to perform at will, while extrinsic can vary in degrees of autonomy, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), p. 60.

Competence

Competence refers to feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to express one's capacities (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). When one is competent in their ability to complete tasks, then they are willing to seek opportunities and activities that challenge or enhance their skill. Niemiec and Ryan (2009), state that satisfaction of both autonomy and competence needs are essential to maintain intrinsic motivation (p. 135). Furthermore, SDT maintains that when students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in the classroom, they are more likely to internalize their motivation to learn and be more autonomously engaged in their studies (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p. 139). Thus, competence taps into one's intrinsic motivation, providing one with the confidence to complete academic tasks, that in returns, may provide some extrinsic reward by having completed the task.

Relatedness

According to Ryan and Deci (2002), relatedness refers to feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community (p. 7). Students are more likely to perform well when they feel connected to someone, or something, they have a sense of belonging, or they believe the teacher values him or her as a person. In the classroom setting Niemiec and Ryan (2000) reiterated by stating:

relatedness is deeply associated with a student feeling that the teacher genuinely likes, respects, and values him or her. Students who report such relatedness are more likely to exhibit identified and integrated regulation for the arduous tasks

involved in learning, whereas those who feel disconnected or rejected by teachers are more likely to move away from internalization and thus respond only to external contingencies and controls. (pp. 139-140)

Flow Theory

Flow is the state of deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable, as when artists or athletes are focused on their play or performance. (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, Shernoff, 2003/2014, p. 477). In 2017, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi stated that the definition of flow was a mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment (Kanban University, 2017, Timestamp 01:36). In this state, a person performs tasks in a subconscious state often as one who says they “are in a zone”.

The metaphor of “flow” is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as “being in the zone”, religious mystics as being in “ecstasy,” artists and musicians as aesthetic rapture. Athletes, mystics, and artists do very different things when they reach flow, yet their description of the experiences are remarkably similarly. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29)

In 2010, VIAStrengths interviewed Csikszentmihalyi in which he stated some criteria and experience of flow.

First of all, there has to be a kind of a clear goal that you want to do that allows you to act and the goal should not be too difficult or too easy, but fairly well match to your skills. And then the activity as you start acting towards the goal should provide feedback immediately and feedback, so you know step-by-step

how you're doing. Then the experience begins, and it begins with a concentration that becomes more and more focused until you essentially step out of your everyday reality into a world that is defined and restricted to your activity. It makes you aware of what type of challenges you can take on that would make you feel experience flow. If you know your strengths, you would avoid trying to do many things that would be above your head or not in your nature. It's the experience of a person who has achieved the balance of challenge and skills.

(Timestamp 0:00-01:51)

The balance between relationship between challenge and skill is best described in a visual that shows when flow is best experienced, see Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

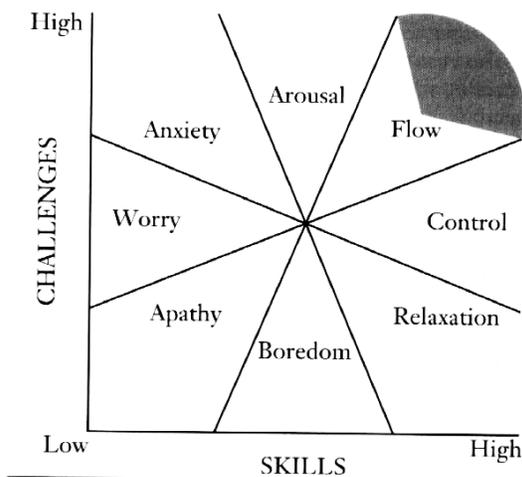


Figure. 2.1 The quality of experience as a function of the relationship between challenges and skills. Optimal experience, or flow, occurrence when both variables are high. From *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (p. 31), by M.

When the challenge of a task is too high in comparison to one's skill ability to complete the task, one experiences anxiety, worry, and then a lack of interest. In contrast, when the

challenge of a task is too low in relation to one's high skill ability to complete the task, one experiences relaxation, which leads to boredom, and then back again to a lack of interest in the task. When both the challenge and the skill are low, one shows a lack of interest, or apathy in the task overall. The fine balance is when both the challenge and the skill are at the same level of level. When high challenges are matched with high skills, then the deep involvement that sets flow apart from ordinary life is likely to occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 30). However, *arousal* and *control* are two states of being in the chart, that allows one to easily move into flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014). From arousal, all one needs to do is get a little bit more skill and they will be in flow. From control, all one needs is a little more challenge and they move into flow. Those two situations are *almost* as good as flow. They are not a quite as good, however, and that's why flow keeps attracting people to improve skill and improve challenge (p. 140).

How does this fit in the grand scheme of the school? Spencer (2017), provides some insight. He states that in order for students to achieve flow, teachers should:

- tap into intrinsic motivation;
- embrace student choice and agency;
- provide the right scaffolding so that student can match the challenge level to their ability levels;
- minimize distractions so that students can focus on learning. Change the pacing so that there are fewer tasks and more time. Here, students enter a state called “deep work”; and

- help student learn to monitor their own progress through metacognition. Teach them to set goals, analyze tasks, figure out what they need to do, make adjustments in the moment and reflect on their progress in the end (Timestamp 03:52).

Feedback

Feedback in flow comes in different forms. It is easy in a task to have a teacher to provide feedback to a student. One form of feedback from a teacher is to provide positive, verbal acceptance of a student's task. However, the most important job of teachers is to be able to teach the student to be able to get feedback from himself or herself, so that they are no longer dependent on the response of the teacher (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 142). This means that the student is no longer depend on external factors to know that their work is satisfactory. Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014) calls students who are at this level, experts – someone who can give feedback to himself or herself in a job (p. 142).

In the process of understanding feedback, clear goals must be set. In creativity tasks, there are no clear goals. No one can tell what the next step in creativity tasks begins or what comes next, or whether what one is doing is good or bad. However, sometimes not receiving both extrinsic success and intrinsic reward during these types of tasks, may cause one to give up (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 143). Therefore, feedback during these tasks come in the form of enjoyment. If one achieves enjoyment, they are able to persevere even without external recognition, external reward (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 143). Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014) concludes that

The ultimate goal of the teacher is to teach the student to develop their own goals and respond to their own feedback, give feedback to themselves. That's when they become autonomous; that's when they become free of the system which administers rewards, often very erratically. But if you [student] have the internalized system, if you [student] have learned what you [student] think is good or bad, then you [student] are free; you [student] are no longer dependent on the outside (p. 143).

Distractions

Distractions can play an important role in a student achieving flow. There are three types of distraction in flow: threats to ego; interrupting, goals arbitrarily; and focusing on the results rather than the process. When there are threats to ego, teachers can either cause the student to feel vulnerable, stupid, or inferior; or the opposite, self-conscious about themselves, states Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014). Teachers who make a student feel vulnerable, stupid, or inferior often do so by humiliating the student in front of his or her peers. When this happens, the student is not concentrating on the subject matter, all they can think of is how they can get back in the good opinion or respect of their classmates because, for most of adolescence and late childhood, the most important thing is to be accepted and respected by their classmates (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, pp. 144-145). Making a person feel stupid or vulnerable in front of the class is a sure way to cut off learning and flow for the rest of the time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 145).

Conversely, invoking self-consciousness, the teacher praises the student to the point that the student's peers think the student is the teacher's pet (Csikszentmihalyi,

1997/2014, p. 145). This means that the teacher over praises, or singles out the student in a positive way that his or her peers think that the student is the teacher's favorite.

Often in the school system, interruptions, or changes in schedule cause a change in flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014) says it is because there is too much emphasis on the clock and constant interruption from the loudspeaker and whatever else may be happening during a typical school day (p. 145).

Children are not allowed the organic development of their interest in a way that is necessary for someone to really experience flow; they are kind of pulled every period into a new set of goals, a new concern, and that is not very healthy for their kind of experience. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 145)

Thus, Csikszentmihalyi (1997/2014) suggest that an emphasis on extracurricular activities allows students to experience the deepest flow, such as when students participate in performing arts or athletics. Such activities provide for a more realistic kind of rhythm of involvement instead of in activities that provide a jerky exposure to information (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 145).

While the results have its role in any task, focusing too much on them, communicates to students, "This task is not fun, but it must be done." Focusing more on the process allows students to find importance in understanding how the knowledge being learned will eventually be used in a real-life situation as a long-range result in some distant future (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014, p. 146).

When goals are clear, feedback relevant to the task, and challenges and skills are in balance with one another, it is in the moment that flow is said to exist.

Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory (SPT) originated in 1976 by psychologists John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie. They defined SPT as the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequence salience of the interpersonal relationships (p. 65). In other words, social presence is seen as the degree to which a person is perceived as a “real person” in mediated communication (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997, p. 9). Social presence explains the effect telecommunications media can have on communication between communicators using some form of communication medium. The type of medium (video, television, audio, etc), has the capability to change the degree of social presence transmitted. The capacity of the medium to transmit information about facial expression, direction of gaze, posture, dress, and nonverbal cues all contribute to the degree of social presence of communications medium (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997, p. 9). Furthermore, Gunawardena & Zittle (1997) cite that Short, William, and Christie (1976), suggest that the social presence of a communications medium contributes to the level of intimacy that depends on factors such as physical distance, eye contact, and smiling (p. 9). They suggest that visual mediums such as television, is able to show facial features, and convey nonverbal cues, provides greater intimacy and social presence than text-based forms of communication.

In the educational setting, social presence has a significant role in online learning because for researchers, social presence falls on a continuum of online learning. On one end of the continuum, social presence is viewed as the degree to which a person is perceived as being “real” and being “there” (Lowenthal, 2009, p. 15). This means that a person in the online learning environment is able to project him or herself as “real” and

are other able to perceive that person as being there and real as well. Thus, on the other end of the continuum, the focus is on whether there is an interpersonal emotional connection between communicators. (Lowenthal, 2009, p. 16). At this end of the continuum, the connection between communicators seems to be one that is positive, and that in the case of most continuums, it probably is in the middle, having both a sense of being there and having an emotional connection with those in the online environment.

Education During a Pandemic

According to the CDC (2019), the 1918 Influenza Pandemic (Spanish Flu) was the last most severe pandemic in recent history. The conditions for education during the year 1918 was not as it is today, considering that the United States was in the midst of World War 1 and access to quality education regardless of race, gender, or ability was not freely accessible to all during that time. Due to the severity of the Spanish Flu, it was the last pandemic to cause schools to temporarily close as a response of its rapid spread in communities in which there was no immunity (Rich, 2020).

Teachers probably sent reading assignments home, but schoolwork was minimal.

If student wanted to practice spelling, they used alphabet or speller boards which were popular learning toys at that time. (Rich, 2020)

During that time, students were required to attend school through the eighth grade (Rich, 2020). The priorities and responsibilities of students during that time were drastically different than students' today, as students tended to have responsibilities that revolved around chores, helping farms, or working in factories (Rich, 2020). From the social constructivist perspective, receiving collaborative learning may have differed than how it is viewed today. Older siblings may have helped younger siblings with lessons; parents

may have helped children, to fill the void of the role of teacher. Technology such as computers, the Internet, cellphones, or televisions were not a part of the life of students during that time and according to Rich (2020) most students walked to school during this time. Without the technological advances used today in modern education, students did not then need to associate the theory behind Social Presence (SPT) as a vital part of their education when they were quarantined. During that time in America's history, closing schools and learning from home was not uncommon and people understood the importance of quarantining because disease was more prevalent and there was little to no availability of vaccines (Maher, 2020; Rich, 2020). Life during this time was so drastically different, that the need of self-determination to complete goals, such as aspirations of completing college, are not the same as ours today. With the low grade level to complete education, responsibilities on the farm, and other cultural norms of that time, their intrinsic motivations were fueled by different aspirations.

Today, 102 years later, the United States has drastically changed in so many ways—technology has morphed into a huge giant that is almost incorporated into every aspect of life; population has more than tripled, as it was estimated that the population was about 103 million (Noymer & Garenne, 2000, p. 566) in 1918, and is approximated at 332 million today (Worldometer, 2019); politics have evolved; medicine has advanced; and education has experienced many revolutions.

With all the changes in education, modern history has not faced one quite like the one COVID-19 has forced on educational stakeholders—students, parents, and educators. The use of technology as the avenue for education became a realization, as a high quality, yet equitable education still had to be the priority. Although some children regularly

attend online schools before COVID-19, the large majority of children had no prior experience with remote learning before the pandemic (Hou, 2020). Some students were also not psychologically ready for the drastic shift in their education (Baber, 2020, p. 286). Not only were some students not psychologically prepared for the change in how their learning would take place, teachers and parents were also not prepared as some homes lacked the infrastructure to handle the modification of such schooling. Teachers needed the right tools and support to adequately teach, but this also opened the eyes of administration to the lack of access to equipment and to reliable Internet in the homes of students.

Administrators and teachers began the process of figuring out how to deliver lessons to students, so that activities for students would allow them to be actively engaged with the content, the teachers, and each other. Thus, they were trying to recreate a learning environment for students that they knew worked under the theory of social constructivism. In the traditional learning environment, teachers and students were not separated socially, being able to constantly rely on each other to collaborate, provide support, and when in the ZPD, provide scaffolding to support learning. Now, with an unknown learning environment where the social aspect was being blocked by a lack of physical presence and substituted by a technological medium, it would be natural to wonder about the effects of social presence and motivation during this type of learning environment. Questions that were being asked of all stakeholders were:

- What kind of support was needed?
- How and in what ways can we ensure the equality of the offered teaching content through online resources?

- What should be the duration of the class?
- How can we provide the necessary motivation for students to learn?

(Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, pp. 217-218)

Teaching and learning took place through different e-platforms: Zoom; Microsoft Teams..., communication with students via mobile phones (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 218). Rethinking how to educate teachers, students, and parents how to use these new educational tools for instruction and learning at the same time was difficult as teachers, students, and parents were struggling under increased workloads while learning these new techniques.

Students were faced with new social challenges of separation from peers and teachers. Many students were not prepared for the adjustment of losing the physical accessibility and presence of their teacher, to which they were previously accustomed. Being socially distant, learning at home; not having the opportunity to socialize, to interacting with classmates and friends, or with the teacher; without opportunities for sharing; are only some issues that have affected young generations (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 218). Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska (2020) state that students' motivation was reflected all these new social factors caused by the pandemic making it difficult to learn and follow online teaching. (p. 218). Provided these factors, the question became how could students become motivated, who would motivate them, and what would keep students positive and motivated to learn during a pandemic (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 218). With the beforementioned technological tools used to provide instruction and learning, students now had at least a limited chance to experience social presence, allowing students to be "seen" by their teacher and their

peers, to interact, and to provide moments when they could question and receive feedback from one another.

In the traditional educational setting, Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska (2020) point out various motivational strategies and activities that teachers incorporate in the classroom that encourage the development of students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Students are encouraged by grades, prestige they have in class, reward systems, or the approximate relationship with the teacher, and sometimes when these effects are no longer there, the effects of learning are weaker (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 220). In addition, Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska (2020) explain that it is important to set goals that are achievable to keep students motivated to continue learning. The goal should be clear, measurable, achievable, one that is challenging, yet not so much so to lead to dissatisfaction and lack of motivation at the beginning of the activity (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 220).

The suggestions that Jovanava-Mitkovska & Pospeska (2020) provide here clearly relate to SDT and Flow. SDT suggest that we all have a need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, with a growth mindset. If one is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to complete a task, all they are have the needs of SDT met, one can possibly experience productivity, through a conscious state of being completely involve in the actively to obtain the goal, experiencing flow. As previously, stated, in flow, clear goals must be set, feedback must be given, so that the motivation to continue in the task, pushes one to completion.

In the traditional setting, the in-person proximity of teacher and student allows the student to also see the empathy, sense of humor, teacher's positive attitude, trust, and

respect for each student (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 220). Being in the physical presence of the teacher and seeing the teacher work in an organizational space, preparing lessons, seeing the teaching process, and applying the procedures necessary to provide an education to students sometimes provides motivation to student learning (Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, 2020, p. 220).

Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, (2020) suggest that during a pandemic where teaching moves to e-learning environment, motivating students to learn is still important and still found in the same ways that are in the traditional setting, such as needing the learning environment to be organized, building student's self-awareness and positive expectations, emphasizing the value of learning, and helping students stay focused on tasks (p. 221). Adding to this environment, Jovanova-Mitkovska, & Popeska, (2020) providing unusual stimulus questions, creating moments for student creativity when students interest has decreased, performing movements, incorporating music, providing time for meditation, video presentations, or audio recordings to increase motivation and connect old knowledge to new knowledge, as they prepare for what is to come in the lesson (p. 222). Consequently, SPT is so important during the e-learning environment. Students need to know that their presence is known, acknowledged, and valued by the instructor in order for them to be motivated in this setting.

Applying appropriate and rich motivational techniques, through the lens of Social Constructivism, SDT, Flow, and SPT in the classroom requires proper training, and as the relationship is built between teacher and student, each learns what motivates the other, monitoring and adjusting as needed; the teacher learns how to successfully teach in the e-

learning environment, while the student learns how to successfully learn in the e-learning environment.

Student Motivation During E-Learning

Moving education to the e-learning environment so abruptly has been an adjustment for students, teachers, and parents. Helping students stay motivated in their studies during a crisis like COVID-19, has become a new daunting challenge for teachers and parents. According to Hoffman (2020), part of the COVID-19 motivational dilemma is the perceived effectiveness of online learning, which some see as ambiguous. Some teachers and many students think online learning is a waste of time. In addition, disadvantaged learners may not have computer access or a reliable internet connection (Hoffman, 2020).

Turner (2020) found that lack of student motivation took a toll on students psychologically. Quite possibly the largest reason students have struggled to stay on top of their schoolwork during this change, is just how big of a shift the quarantine has been from their daily lives, and how it has affected them mentally (Turner, 2020).

Not only are students mentally affected by the pandemic, but the academic workload also seemed to have increased after transitioning to online learning. Turner (2020) says that students are finding it hard to keep up with academics because teachers are assigning more work than they would in the traditional setting. Therefore, it was causing a decrease in motivation for some students.

Turner (2020) also cited the inconsistency of schedules from teacher to teacher as well as different approaches that teachers took with their online classes, as it made it difficult for students to keep track of what was assigned. Students reported that they were

taking classes on different platforms, Zoom, Google Meet, etc., and it was causing confusion as to what was expected of them in the online environment (Turner, 2020).

Morrison (2020) suggest that to help students be motivated in the e-learning environment, they should receive regular feedback and encouragement, which was found to be more effective than urging them to get better grades or to be the best in the class.

Previous Studies

El-Seoud et al (2014) conducted a study on student motivation and e-learning on higher education students. Researchers of this study have noted that the increase of e-learning among educational institutions has changed higher education because of increased enrollment. One of the main reasons for this is it give students' greater access to education in comparison to traditional methods of teaching as students can undertake their study from anywhere and at any time (El-Seoud et al, 2014, p. 20). In their study, however, the goal was to find what was necessary for teachers in the online environment to motivate students. These researchers noticed the student-teacher relationship became less personal. Therefore, they conducted a quantitative study to determine the use of technology in teaching within a higher education context and to determine the various factors that affect students' motivation towards e-learning (El-Seoud, 2014, p. 22).

Participants in this study were from two universities where e-learning was the main tool of learning. Participants backgrounds included, engineering, political science, business, pharmacy, and dentistry, and the study's surveys were administered by their department instructors. Researchers conducted two different studies to test five different hypotheses. In doing so, participants were given two different exercises: a Web-based

Interactive and Paper-Based. The activities were conducted at home in a two-week period.

In the first study, students were given a twelve-question survey, in which assessed their willingness to use e-learning and to measure their attitude towards e-learning. Students placed a number value besides questions ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The findings were that students showed a preference towards online activities as opposed to traditional method of learning and they showed a difference towards e-learning based on the student's faculty, or major. This makes sense because in this study there are a variety of different-minded people taking the survey about e-learning. Someone studying to become a dentist would not want to spend their time learning via e-learning. They strive for the social presence and the social aspect the traditional environment offers. El-Seoud et al (2014) noted that non-IT students may need to increase their technological and communication skills to be able to benefit significantly in the e-learning environment (p. 25). In the e-learning environment, it is viewed as an environment that work is independently completed, and when students lack the confidence to complete difficult tasks due to not having the face-to-face interaction with the instructor or fellow student, they lack motivation. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism states that students learn new knowledge in collaborative environments with others. One component of Deci & Ryan's (2002/2004) Self-Determination Theory is competence. When one is satisfied with their ability to complete a task, they are intrinsically motivated and their confidence allows to see through to completion (Deci & Ryan, 2002/2004)

In the second study, the researchers investigated whether there was a relationship between web-based exercise and student performance in e-learning activities and whether the teacher has impact on the willingness of the student to use web-based exercises. Students were given the opportunity to choose between the web-based exercise or the paper-based exercise to complete a questionnaire survey. Based on their research, they found that student performance was not hindered in either format, online or traditional. However, the teacher does have impact on students' willingness to use Web-based exercises, because possibly some majors need more in-person presence than others. The researchers noted that there could be multiple reasons for this finding, but it would require further investigation.

Theory of Social Presence (SPT) could support this part of their findings. While it is true that the variety of faculty was the affect they were suggesting, SPT, the belief one feels to be a real person in an online environment, could also be a contributing factor students' willingness to use Web-based exercises. As El-Seoud et al (2014) noted that when instructors lack personal contact with students is it difficult to assess student motivation through online learning (p. 25). They also noted that it could be beneficial to have students complete an online assessment on motivation to better understand their students' motivations to help guide instruction while in the online environment.

Bilbrey (2017) conducted a quantitative study in which he used the Self-Determination Theory to show that rewards based on extrinsic motivations may produce intrinsic motivation in post-secondary mathematics students. He investigated the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation by assessing student's intrinsic motivation before and after extrinsic factors had been used motivate the student. The

researcher used one instrument, the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) Survey to establish a baseline intrinsic motivational level for students. Then students were asked what types of factors motivated them in the past when it came to mathematics. Based on responses, those rewards were given to students in the courses for one week. Students then completed the IMI survey again to measure intrinsic motivation. According to Bibrery (2017), this method worked because,

...it provided an opportunity to demonstrate that extrinsic motivators can produce statistically significant results when improving intrinsic motivation. There is not only a need to see that students receiving extrinsic motivational factors gain intrinsic motivation but also what extrinsic factors motivated them (p. 60).

Bibrery (2017) found that extrinsic reward effectively increased intrinsic motivation for low motivation students only. The researcher found that this may be because extrinsic rewards do not necessarily improve intrinsic motivation for all students (Bibrery, 2017, p. 69). The small rewards provided seemed to produce the impetus needed for the lower motivated students to increase their overall intrinsic motivation. (Bibrery, 2017, pp. 69-70). The researcher also found that the reward given to students in the study did not influence their overall intrinsic motivation as a result of receiving the extrinsic motivator.

Baber (2020) conducted a study examining the determinants of students' perceived learning outcomes during the Pandemic of COVID-19. Baber (2020) stated in his study that the lack of interest or motivation is one of the main things which hinders the growth of online learning, and this way it also increases the scale of dropouts from

online courses (p. 286). Due to the suddenness of the shift to online learning, the debate began about the quality of learning and student satisfaction (Baber, 2020, p. 286).

Baber's (2020) study consisted of undergraduate students between the ages of 18-26. The researcher compared the data from fifty participants from two countries—South Korea and India. Their experience with e-learning was either “Enough”, “None”, or “Not Much”. These conditions relate to SDT component of competence. By answering their level of experience with e-learning, telling the researcher their level of competence—sense of confidence and effective (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7) with e-learning. To gather data of the perceived learning outcomes of student learning during the pandemic, Baber (2020) measured qualitatively the interaction, student motivation, course structure, instructor facilitation/knowledge, student perceived learning, and student satisfaction via a survey given in English through different institutions in those countries. Based on results from data collected, Baber (2020) concluded that there is a strong influence of interaction in an online class together with student motivation on the student's perceived learning (p. 288). This correlates to social constructivism as individuals develop knowledge through interactions with others (Lynch, 2016). It also seems that Social Presence was positive, as a result of the study. An e-learning community is where all participants are engaged in constructing meaning, collaboratively confirming, and sharing knowledge (Garrison, 2011, p. 121). Also, according to Ryan and Deci (2002), when there is not confidence, the motivation to complete tasks, is low. student perceived learning also positively affects student satisfaction in online classes during a pandemic (Baber, 2020, p. 288). Though the study took place in two different countries, there was no difference in student perceived learning and student satisfaction (Baber, 2020).

Barbour & Rich (2007) conducted a case study through the lens of social constructivism on e-learning. In this study, they investigated students who were enrolled in an asynchronous, Web-based Advanced Placement (AP) European History classes in school in Canada and the US to see if they would effectively utilize the system of online learning. The Knowledge Forum is the online database that they use to for written interaction in the social constructivist environment (Barbour & Rich).

To build a sense of community, students spend a week introducing themselves and getting to know each other. Social Presence theory (SPT) though often relates teacher to student, Vincent-Layton (n.d), suggest that other interactions are just as important in online-environments. Look for ways to connect students-to-students, students-to-content, and students-to-the-world. Provide engaging opportunities for student to introduce themselves to you and their classmates (Vincent-Layton, n.d.). Once students were acquainted, the were to write a well-written document in the Knowledge Form based on a document-based question (DBQ).

Prior to the writing, all students were provided with samples of document-based responses and previous student responses of students with commentary. A well-written response, a moderate response, and a poorly written response were included, with a rubric for evaluation. They also practiced their own DBQ before the official project and was graded based on the rubric to provide feedback for future attempts.

Students were given their DBQ which they were required to have completed by the end of the week. At the end of the week, rubrics were given, and students were asked to evaluate two of their peer's responses using the rubric. This week seems to follow the theory of Flow and social constructivism. While students were working individually,

possibly, they had to rely on their own feedback (Csikszentimihalyi (1997/2014)), or competence (Ryan & Deci, 2002), in order to be satisfied with what they had to turn in. At the end of the week, after students had produced everything they could through their zone of proximal development (Vykgoksy, 1978) students were supported by their peers through scaffolding by offering feedback to their work (Hammond & Gibbons, 2001). By the end of the fourth week, the teacher provided evaluations of the students' responses and they analyzed the differences. Now students are receiving external feedback from their peers and their teacher to allow them to make revisions on their work, and once again, find the self-determination to make revisions on the task. The goal to go from a possible poorly written response to a well-written response.

Students were able to build a community and have social interaction with peers through feedback in an online environment. They also created a socially interactive e-learning environment where students were actively engaged, and high analytical skills accessed. The results of the AP exams were not available at the time of the report, however, the researchers' interpretation of written responses and students' interaction in class was said to be of high-quality learning.

Chapter Summary

Some of the studies on student motivation in e-learning environments were reviewed with analysis on factors that may or may not have contributed to motivating factors. Being that most studies have been conducted outside of the times of a pandemic, many of them are not influenced by the affects a crisis such as that can have on the motivation of a student to want to learn in an e-learning environment. Nonetheless,

understanding the background of e-learning and motivation of students is important to understand the narratives of these students.

Having knowledge of how Social Constructivism, Self-determination theory, Flow theory, and Social Presence Theory impacts the narratives of students' motivational experiences during e-learning after their learning environment abruptly changed from a traditional setting is important to understanding their story.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher discusses in detail the research methods used to understand the narratives of a few of the students who experienced e-learning at the beginning of the pandemic. Procedures and methodologies for data collection, and ethical guidelines to conduct the research are also included in this chapter. Also discussed, are the steps to collect, analyze, and authenticate the research findings. In addition, this chapter describes the population, the sample studied for this research, the instruments for this data collection, the data collected, and the description of data analysis and reporting.

Problem Statement

As a high school mathematics teacher, I am often looking for ways to motivate my students to learn mathematics. However, with the recent shift in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding my student's motivation to learn due to their learning environment holds a greater interest now. My problem of practice looks to determine ways the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the educational environment and the learning motivation of students. Understanding from their perspectives, their motivations to learn in an e-learning environment, and what types of supports they need in this new environment can help me in my practice, as well as my colleagues, as it seems that e-learning may be a part of the educational future.

Statement of Purpose for the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to examine the motivational changes in honors students as they completed high school through e-learning. There is a

lack of research regarding to student's motivation to learning through e-learning as high school students. Honors students are often viewed as capable of producing quality work and having the academic knowledge to be successful; however, due to circumstances such as the pandemic caused by COVID-19, many lack the motivation to push through to completion of assignments in an e-learning environment.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study was the following:
How does changing to an e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments? In addition, other questions that followed were:

1. What external or internal factors influenced motivation to complete assignments during e-learning?
2. How can teachers change the structure of e-learning to better support student's motivation to complete assignments?

Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative, narrative inquiry. Examining student's motivation to learn when the learning environment is changed to e-learning allowed the researcher to gather information about student's motivation and e-learning through the telling of their story. This was obtained through a questionnaire, interviews, and a group interview discussion. As this is action research, it will not necessarily provide all the immediate answers to how students learn or what educators can do to improve practice (Ferrance, 2000, p. 30). The goal of action research is not to generalize findings to other settings but instead to have a clear and in-depth understanding of the setting the research takes place (Mertler, 2020, p. 141).

Narrative inquiry is a design of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). Furthermore, Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that the narrative can combine views from the participant's life with those of the research's life in a collaborative narrative (p. 13).

Narrative inquiry involves three stages of telling, transcribing, and analyzing, according to Riessman (1993). Telling the story requires the researcher to have personal contact with the participants in order to ask questions to allow them the opportunity to provide personal accounts for their experiences. These questions can come in the forms of surveys or interviews. Transcribing happens next, when the researcher takes note to specific details given in the narrative process, in which recording took place. After the transcripts have been made from the narratives, analyzing occurs of all data collected to find overarching themes.

Participants

The four participants are former honors students who were seniors during the 2019-2020 school year. Students are 18 years old or older, those who experienced e-learning first during the pandemic and could provide firsthand experience about their motivation during e-learning. Students were contacted via email with a Letter of Consent/Invitation letter informing them of the study and offering them a chance to participate in the study.

There were seven students who agreed to participate in the study, however, four of them completed the study. Completing the study meant that participants participated in

at least the survey and the interview part of data collection. Two participants were males, one white and one Black, and two participants were females, one white and one Black.

To protect the identities of the participants, the participants chose a pseudonym, or a pseudonym was given to them and used for the duration of the study. All data collected was stored on a fingerprint-locked protected computer, which included surveys, consent forms, interview questions, recordings, and transcripts.

Positionality

I acknowledge that my own positionality may have affected my own viewpoints and interpretations of the data collected from the survey, interview, and group interview. I, too, am a former honors student, and though I have not necessarily experienced the same hardships as these students through the pandemic, I can identify with this academic classification. Also, as a teacher who experienced teaching during the time of the pandemic when this research was conducted, it gives me an insight into some similar experiences to which the students referred. Just as the students experienced e-learning, I experienced e-teaching, which helped to shape my understanding and feelings of things that the students may have felt about their experiences about motivation during that time.

This topic became a personal interest to me due to the recent events involving education and the pandemic as I noticed the lack of motivation in my students as they moved to e-learning. I, too, could relate to their motivation in completing my dissertation, as I experienced things in my journey that affected my motivation as well (changing schools in which I taught, changing topics, suicide of a student, a new coaching assignment of coaching high school tennis). However, the pandemic, as well as other factors, renewed my motivation to complete my dissertation. Due to my own motivation

to finish, my topic changing to involve my student's motivation, and wanting to understand their motivation during e-learning, I found myself engrossed in research. However, though I gathered some understanding through their narratives, this research did not provide the entire story of all that could possibly be revealed.

Instruments

In order to gather the narratives of my participants, first participants were given an open-ended survey (Appendix B). Having participants answer an open-ended survey, allowed participants to provide specific details answers about their experiences. Participants also participated in semi-structured interview (Appendix C) with the researcher. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) state that interviewing is necessary when the researcher cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how the participants interpret the world around them (p. 108). Additionally, it is a beneficial form of data collection when the researcher is interested in past events that are difficult to replicate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). All research participants responded to the same interview questions but were provided opportunities to clarify responses when necessary. Students were also asked clarifying responses to their survey questions before the interview begin. A group interview (Appendix D) was also conducted with participants through interactive discussion as participants shared their views, heard each other's views, and refined their views based on what they heard (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114).

Data Collection

Permission to conduct the study was obtain through The Office of Research Compliance through the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board for Human Research. All participants are 18 years of age or older and did not need parental

consent to participate in the study. However, each participant was given a Letter of Consent/Invitation letter (Appendix A) detailing the purpose of the study as well as the confidentiality process throughout the study. Each participant who wanted to participate returned a signed copy indicating they wanted to participate in the study, as well as understood that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The data collection process included a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and group interview. These measures allowed the researcher gather information from the participants' experiences about e-learning and their motivations during learning in the environment. The questionnaire and interviews allowed me to better understand their motivations, the factors of their motivations in both the traditional and e-learning environments. These two sources of data collection were focused to support the primary research question of the study. The group interview was to provide insight to tie all the pieces together, but also to allow the participants to focus their support on the instructional support teachers could provide during the e-learning environment. The questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and group interview discussion topics together, all asked questions related to the theoretical framework of social constructivism self-determination, flow theory, and social presence themes found in their responses.

Due to the pandemic, all interaction with participants and data collection was electronic. The questionnaire in the form of an open-ended survey was sent via Microsoft Forms. The average time to complete the survey questions was 25 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all students who completed the survey. Two participants completed the survey. However, one stopped responding to me and one experienced a family emergency. They did not participate in the interview

process, so their survey responses are not considered in this study. All interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams and recorded. The interviews took about twenty minutes each.

The design of the interview questions provided opportunity for follow-up and probing questions as needed to provide clarity to their narratives. The use of recording and notes, allowed me the opportunity to review, transcribe, and analyze the information collected.

The group interview discussion consisted of four participants and lasted approximated forty-five minutes. The group interview sessions provided the participants an opportunity to openly discuss topics related to the pandemic, e-learning, and motivation, while drawing from each other's experiences, and learning how the environment could be better supported by teachers from their perspective.

The students' various backgrounds were taken into consideration, but addressed motivational, presence, and instructional support from teachers. The group interview was also conducted on Microsoft Teams and recorded and later transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202). In a qualitative study, the main goal of data analysis is to find answers to the research question by finding *categories*, *themes*, or *findings* from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I began looking for common themes after the survey questions, looking for similarities in responses, as well as how they applied to the theoretical framework of the study. I also began to think about how their narratives were providing answers to the

questions to the study. As I did this, it also allowed me to think about what types of questions needed to be asked for the interview and group interview session. In additions, clarifying questions to their responses to the survey also arose.

After the semi-structured interviews and group interview, the recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were re-read to check for accuracy before they were searched through for common themes. Themes that came from the data were relationships, structure, and goals played a vital role in how the students managed during e-learning.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative, narrative inquiry study design was employed to study students' motivation during e-learning environment as they responded to a survey, participated in a semi-structured interview, and a group interview. This chapter provided the details of the design of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study. It provided information about the participants, the instruments, and the method used to conduct the study. It also gave in detail the process used to collect data and the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 outlines the findings and interpretations from the data gathered from this qualitative, narrative inquiry study. This action research study provides an avenue to collect data as narratives of recently graduated high school students who experienced e-learning as a result of a pandemic caused by COVID-19, as they shared their experience with e-learning and motivation to learn. This chapter organizes these findings from data collected through interviews, survey, and a focus groups session, while aligning the finding to theories discussed in Chapter 2.

Review of Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the sudden change that has occurred as participating honors students and their teachers grapple with the stress and change in motivation caused by the pandemic that began in the spring of 2020 as school shifted to virtual learning. Listening to the stories of those who have experienced the event can provide insights for my practice, as well as others.

There were seven students who agreed to participate in the study; however, four completed at least two parts of the data collection procedures, allowing their narratives to be included in the findings. These students recently graduated from high school, all from the same school district. They were all identified as honors students according to the South Carolina Department of Education and were former students in one of my honors mathematics courses. Qualitative data was collected in the form of a survey, asking students about their motivations to engage in their lessons before and after the shift to e-

learning. Follow-up questions were asked in the interview session for clarification, which was then followed by an additional interview, asking students more in-depth questions about their motivation during e-learning, why they were or why not motivated, what types of resources were available to them, and what other types of motivating factors affected their learning experience. Interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, which were recorded, and then transcribed verbatim to ensure that the experiences of each student were accurately narrated. The responses that follow below are direct quotes from the participants. A focus group session was also conducted with four participants to discuss similarities and differences in experiences with e-learning and motivation, and also to provide insight into what instructional support could be given by educators in the e-learning environment.

Analysis of the Findings

As mentioned in the positionality, my motivation to continue my journey was compared to a sailboat. In one phase of my sailboat's time, it was "smooth sailing"—everything was on the right plan, with little difficulty or problems. The second phase, my sailboat was "in deep water"—in trouble, out of my comfort zone; everything was out of my control. Finally, in my last phase, I finally got back "on the right tack" by having support from those around me to help me get the wind back in my sails and get the momentum back to get my sailboat moving again. This is how the phase of the narrations of the participants, David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric, will be described. Each phase will correlate to a time of their education while also adjusting to unprecedented change.

Smooth Sailing

David is a white male, 18 years old. He is very laid back, and according to him is “no way motivated” in his studies. David played baseball in high school. He comes from a two-parent home with an older sibling, but at the time of the e-learning experience was the only child at home. His parents work good jobs and both parents being college educated. David was a student in my Pre-Calculus Honors class. Currently, David is studying at a four-year university in the AFROTC program with a major in engineering.

David was a popular, well-known student in school. Learning came easily for David; however, when he was in my class, he rarely applied himself, and as mentioned from his survey and during the focus group he was not motivated in his studies. When he answered the survey question about what aspects he liked about the traditional school setting, he answered, “I liked most [of] my teachers. It was fun being there. I mean, obviously, it's school at the end of the day. So, a lot of it wasn't fun. But I think overall, I had a positive experience.” While talking to him, I mentioned the social aspect, because I was surprised that he did not mention it. I vividly I recalled he was so social in school, finding excuses to leave his class to wander the halls, and end up in my class just to “chill” or wander in another teacher’s class. He then went on to say,

Obviously, I like the social aspect. I mean, education is fun in general...the greater the lens you can look at life through. But there’s some tedious things because, you know, at some point they have to quantify if you learned or not, and so all that, you know, worksheets and all that I never found interesting.

At that point, I talked about David’s perspective to things, that showed his intellect, that while he was in school and had discussions about things, his perspective was often

profound. He commented, “Social studies is my best subject by far. That’s why I want to be political science. But you know, Uncle Sam told me different, so we did different.” David always told me when he was in high school that he wanted to major in political science. When we reconnected for the research, and I asked how he was enjoying school and his major, I was surprised to learn that he was not majoring in political science, but in engineering, and the reason was because he was in the AFROTC program at the university.

During his years of schooling, when David was asked what or who motivated him to work hard and earn good grades, he said, “My mother and my father...little of nothing else. I’m lucky, I guess.”

All seemed well in David’s world and on his sailboat, until he will later share how he found himself lost, adrift in a storm, needing a little redirection, while in the middle of a new situation.

Linda is another student I taught. She is a Black female, 18 years old. She is highly motivated during her studies and is extremely conscientious, finishing in the top 5% of her graduating class. Linda was also a student-athlete playing both high school tennis and softball. She comes from a two-parent home, with an older sibling; however, at the time of the experience, was the only child at home. Her mother is a nurse, and her father is an entrepreneur, selling and repair appliances. She was a student in my Geometry Honors and International Baccalaureate Mathematics course and is currently attending a four-year university pursuing a pharmacy degree.

While interviewing with Linda, I asked about what aspects she enjoyed about schools, she said, “The interactions with her friends, with my teachers, being able to be in

like different groups such as Beta Club [a national academic achievement and leadership organization], just being able to help people, and at the same time, enjoying people's company, and actually learning new stuff.” This was evident in the various school events in which she participated. She was always involved in various committees, such as committees that required school and district level personnel to sometimes call on for student input. She also taking classes that were preparing her for her career, Career and Technology Education (CATE) courses.

Linda was asked who or what kept her motivated during her traditional school days. In her survey she answered, “As a student my goal is to always make A’s and B’s. I mainly reach for A’s, but a B is the lowest I allow myself to get. Even though school isn’t always something I want to deal with, I am motivated to learn in the traditional school environment. Having the ability to see my teachers face-to-face really helps when it comes to learning styles, interactions, and most importantly focus. Also, being able to interact with my classmates helps a lot.”

Linda’s academic world was perfect, and all a parent could ask for from a student. I watched her follow in the footsteps of her sister, both academically and athletically, and she had everything going for her. Yet, her sailboat was shaken in the mist of the storm, surrounded by troubled waters as well.

Jamie was another former student who shared her experience. Jamie is a white female, also 18 years old. Jamie is a free-spirited kind of girl, sometimes doing things without first considering the consequences of her actions. At the time of e-learning she and her older brother were at home. Jamie’s father has a college degree, while her mother does not. Jamie was a student in my Pre-Calculus Honors class. As a cheerleader, Jamie

was a student-athlete in high school. Jamie is attending a four-year university pursuing a biology degree to become a physician assistant to an orthopedic surgeon.

Jamie was a popular student in school as well. Jamie has an outgoing personality, and at about 6'1", she makes herself known in social situations, a social butterfly. Jamie said that school has been a struggle for her, especially in classes in which she is less interested, such as history and English. She also said, "I know I am a huge procrastinator and have major potential, and I am definitely working on that right now. I am naturally smart; I just have to apply myself harder." As a student in my class, this used to be our tug-of-war. It was a constant back-and-forth trying to get her to use her time wisely, turning assignments in on time, as well as believing in herself, that she had the ability to do just as well as her classmates if she applied herself.

Jamie's answer to what she liked about traditional school during the interview was, "It was fun seeing everyone every day, even though sometimes, I didn't come a lot, but that's just because I get tired easily. So I'm just not good at waking up early." She continued by saying, "I liked being able to see friends. If I need to ask a question, I could ask my teacher right then and there. It's just a lot easier for me to do things in person, like worksheets on paper in front of me. I feel like I'm pretty visual and like hands-on kinesthetic, whatever."

As we continued talking, I asked her who or what motivated her to do well in her studies during her traditional school years. Jamie replied,

Myself—but also the thought of like, getting a bad grade. Well, this sounds stupid, but like the thought of getting a bad grade, while all my friends are getting good grades, it's just like embarrassing. And I'm like, "Well if I had just like,

done this one thing and just turn it in on time, I would have had a better grade than them.” So like, myself, like comparing myself to other people. I want to be one of the good ones. I want to be one of the people that others try and compare themselves to, because my grades are just as good.

The pandemic rocked Jamie’s sailboat and sent her lost at sea where her comforts would cause her to feel isolated.

Then, there is Eric. Eric is a Black male, 18 years old. He is “attentive and eager” to learn. He comes from a two-parent but is an only child. His mother is college-educated, while his father has not attended college. Eric was also a student-athlete running cross country, playing tennis, and high school basketball. Eric was a student in my Pre-Calculus Honors class. Eric is attending a four-year university pursuing a degree in mathematics education to become a middle school math teacher.

At first, Eric was shy and serious, but once he got to know his classmates and me, and we got to know him, he was known as a helper, compassionate about what he involved himself in, athletic, and also the comic class entertainment.

Eric answered in the survey on the question talking about himself and what kind of student his was,

My interest in school is very high. I love to learn and be educated by someone who knows what they are talking about. I am a visual learner, so I love to be in a class with a teacher who does hands-on activities and interacts with the students. I am a student who is always attentive and comes in with the mindset that I will learn and make something of myself one day.

During the interview, we talked about the traditional school setting and what type of student he was in that setting. Like the others, I asked him what aspects he liked about that setting. He commented, “The interaction, hands-on activities, being around my peers, other classmates, working together, and group discussions.” I then asked him what motivated him to do well in his studies. “I wanted to succeed. But not only did I want to see myself, my peers, my teachers, they also wanted to see me succeed. It motivated me to just keep going because everybody wants to see me succeed.”

The pandemic took Eric’s sailboat deep into sea as well. He found ways to cope and found the momentum to keep his sailboat moving.

Before the pandemic began, David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric, all expressed that they had relationships with people who helped them be successful. A key component of SDT is a sub-theory called Relationships Motivation Theory. This theory explains that giving and receiving autonomous support in a relationship from both parties must be high quality. High quality relationships are characterized by both the giving and receiving of autonomy and relatedness satisfaction. (Reeve et al, 2018, p. 24). In relationships where both give and received autonomy support, the relationship facilitates greater satisfaction, security, and wellness (Reeve et al, 2018, p. 24). In this case, for the students, there are many relationships from which they receive support to feel motivated to succeed to find success. Ryan & Deci (2017) says there is no functioning without relationships (p. 295). People have a basic psychological need for relatedness, the satisfaction of which is essential to growth, integrity, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 297). Students must be able to find a level of care, support, trust, security, and involvement from the teachers to be motivated to learn, so that they can receive guidance when necessary. Students rely

on the relationship of peers and family as motivational support to provide meaning, teamwork, and social aspect to their life. This falls under the relatedness part of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

In Deep Water

The pandemic of 2020 hit, and sent David's, Linda's, Jamie's, and Eric's sailboats into troubled water with very little guidance or direction about what was happening with school. The school environment from which they found motivational support had changed. On March 15, 2020, South Carolina's governing officials announced closings of school buildings to limit the spread of COVID-19, and literally overnight, classes shifted to an on-line. This became "rough seas" for many educators and students.

For David, some things stayed the same. He said that he remained unmotivated in his schoolwork, but probably even more so. "When we got out for the spring, I will not lie, I was in no way motivated to continue learning. However, this does not come to me naturally, so it was to be expected." David thought that school was "pointless". I asked him about what he thought about e-learning and the experience overall. During the group interview, he said, "I thought it complete and utter trash. I thought I saw no reason because all the teachers didn't know what they were doing either. So I didn't really do anything. Because who cared? And I still got good grades. So I mean in the end, I did work but that was because my parents made me, not because any teacher or anything like that." He continued his statement during the interview by saying, "I became less motivated about school, but not that I wanted to give up, but it just wasn't that interesting anymore. I just got on my computer, do the work and then it is what it is. But this is

different than from going to school and being around people. You have different conversation besides work in my bed.”

However, even though he was completing assignments he said that the assignments were not completed to the best of his ability. Therefore, I was not surprised when he said that he did not enjoy e-learning.

No. Um, I mean, I think that if you treat it the right way, it would have been pretty simple to handle. But I think that, you know, I think I did more than a lot of other kids. And I think I had a pretty good system right out, but I think it was just hodgepodge. You know, it felt like it because obviously, no one knew this was coming. So it felt like no one was prepared. And, most of the work I was given was just busy work, just the worksheet here, maybe some stupid online little class activity there. It just felt like everybody was just trying to get random grades, so they could just, you know, show to Sarah Cox [principal, pseudonym] and be like, here, ‘I did my class’.

David also mentioned that he had difficulty with the structure of e-learning environment because he was outside the physical structure of the school building. One of the reasons he was not doing his work to the best of his ability was because he stated, “Without the need to show up somewhere everyday my family would take trips where maybe Wi-Fi was not available so I would have to plan accordingly.” I wanted to know more about it and have dialog about it the group interview, so I asked him about it. He said, “We have a beach house. When there’s nothing, when there’s no physical space, you have to be at, you know, you can really be wherever you want. So, we were going

places, I was doing things. I mean, it's hard to just remember to log on and even want to log on when you're someplace cool.”

Another structural difficulty was the lack of continuity of the technical architecture of the e-learning environment,

Every teacher used a different software (Edmodo, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) for assignments and communication. It was tough for students to keep up with what was due and what teacher were doing sometimes. You would forget to check a certain teacher's page on a different program. With the already difficult task of doing schoolwork with no one forcing you to do it, it was very hard to keep up with the many different programs teachers were using.

SDT states environmental structure as being a part of what builds a child's confidence. *Structure* concerns the degree to which socializing agents such as parents (and teachers) organize their children's environment to promote mastery and effectiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 236).

Linda had some similar experiences, yet her concerns were different. She said in her survey response, “When I got the news that I was going to be finishing my senior year on-line, I was devastated. In school, I hated taking tests online. Imagine how I felt when class time, quizzes, tests, and assignments were pushed to online. In my opinion, e-learning is not learning. I was no longer learning information.” When she answered about her motivations in e-learning and how her motivation may have differed or stayed the same from the traditional environment, she said, “Once e-learning started, I was no longer motivated to do anything school-related. Honestly, I became lazy. My senior year was cut short. I knew I wasn't going to be able to experience the things every senior

should experience, such as prom, last sessions of sports, regular graduation, etc., which contributed to my lack of motivation.” This was an understandable sentiment from Linda. She was in the middle of softball season when the schools closed, and she was a great player.

During the group interview, Linda spoke after David expressed his thoughts about e-learning being “complete and utter trash”. She said, “I wouldn’t say I wanted to give up; I just became less determined to do the work. Who wants to do work online”?

She had the same sentiment as David, about not completing assignments to the best of her ability. She said “I don’t think I was doing my assignments to the best of my ability. I was now completing work for completion to get the good grade. I was no longer learning and obtaining the information being taught.” She mentioned during her survey that being at home caused her to be distracted. “Being at home, which is a completely different setting than being at school had a huge impact to my lack of motivation.” She went on to describe how her day went while at home. “During e-learning, I would wake up 5 minutes prior to class, sit in bed, and go throughout the class like that.”

In addition, her inability to have direct interaction with her teachers or peers was viewed as a hindrance for her completing her work well, during e-learning. “They [teachers] weren’t there when I needed something to be checked over, I couldn’t ask questions I thought of at a later time, etc.” She also said she missed the interaction with her peers and that impacted her motivation.

Not being able to interact with fellow classmates and friends also had a[n] impact on my lack of motivation. I’m not sure if many people realize it yet but being around people you feel safe around and have the same as you, makes you want to

do better. In my classes, we worked as a team. We did things to help and better one another. Being at home, away from everyone, this changed. We were no longer able to have laughs, cries, highs, lows, and celebrations.

Though Linda had these experiences, she had people in her life who helped motivate, as well as goals, to help her sailboat find fair winds be back on the right tack.

Jamie also struggled during e-learning and did not hold back with her feelings. During the interview, her words were, “Um, it sucks. I hate e-learning like a burning passion”, as I asked her about her experience with e-learning. She felt like teachers were not being fair with the time and assignments, but she also felt the structure of things was so drastically different.

I feel like people expect us to have a lot more free time. But with the workload that teachers are assigning us, we have less free time, or [as] much time to get other work done, especially having another job that you work like five hours a day where that’s already five hours that you can do stuff. Then they expect you to work from 8:30 AM to 3 PM. Plus work on top of that. Then asynchronous classes are the worst class ever designed or thought of ever. I don’t like watching video of someone write a math equation. That’s why I did so bad in my math class, because it was asynchronous. I think synchronous classes are better, as bad as they are. I would definitely like in-person classes better. I just hate e-learning.

“My motivation decreased drastically”, Jamie’s response to how her motivation changed due to school moving to e-learning. She continued by saying, “I was excited for summer and thought on-line school would be just something I could easily zip through”.

While talking to her in her one-on-one interview, she described her day, and why she disliked e-learning.

I would wake up every day at 11 AM, check my computer; there would be either so much schoolwork that I had no time to finish, or literally nothing to do. And then if I had questions, I'd have to email someone but no one would respond to me for a long time. But it's just because everyone was still so new to it. No one knew what they were doing.

With some of these inconsistencies, Jamie said that her motivation continued to decrease. "The closer I got to summer and graduation, my motivation kept going down, and I was falling behind in my math class and my history class. And then I was like, I gotta do everything in like three days so I can graduate". Jamie, like the others, felt like the work given during e-learning was busy work, and not designed to teach information. "Everything was just busy work, and I was just doing everything to get a good grade, not learn."

Before interviewing Jamie, I was curious to see how her motivators would have changed, during the e-learning experience, due to how she said surrounding herself with peers who were going through the same thing as she was and being in direct contact with her teachers was her motivation during the traditional school environment. With those things taken away, I wondered how she was coping. As I suspected, the way her personality is, the separation from everything took a toll.

I just really didn't have any motivation. The whole quarantine thing was so new to me. I was sad because I was all lonely and stuff. I would just get more sad. I felt like I was doing nothing during the day. I would just stay in bed all day. I was

super unmotivated the whole time. I was like, 'I have way too much going on in my life. I deserve a break.' And I would stay like that every other day. And so then I would get nothing done. But eventually I figured it all out.

This was a concern to me, as I remembered in most all the other surveys and interviews, that they all mentioned someone other than themselves or something that motivated them during their traditional school setting that also helped during the e-learning setting. I asked her if she had a good relationship with her mom, and she said she did, then she said, "She's not as involved as other parents are. She'll ask, 'How are your grades'?" And I'm like, 'Good.' And she just says, 'Okay.'" I guess it later made sense when she said during the interview that her mom did not have an education beyond high school, but her father had a college degree.

She felt like there was not a need to try at times because teachers were not responding to her emails for help when she needed it with her assignments. "They [teachers] would take forever to answer emails about urgent questions." I asked her what she deemed as urgent, to which she responded, "If there's an assignment due, and they like assign it that day, and we have a few hours to complete it, and some of us don't understand, we can email them, but they'd never respond. And so then our assignments are late or something, something that can affect our grade, I guess." Thus, she felt with not response, there was no need to try. "If I'm gonna have to wait for a response, then I'm just like, 'Well, if they're not going to answer, then there's not reason for me to even try'."

In the case of Jamie, she was not confident in herself that she was capable of doing the work. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), feelings of *effectance* nourish

people's selves, whereas, feelings of *ineffectance* threatens their feelings of agency and undermine their ability to mobilize and organize action (p. 95). In other words, to develop a true sense of perceived competence, people's actions must be perceived as self-organized or initiated; people must feel ownership of the activities at which they succeed (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 95).

Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2017) argue that competence and autonomy go hand-in-hand. People will internalize a sense of competence, especially when they feel efficacy at an activity they have initiated or willingly undertaken. In other words, the full satisfaction of competence is enhanced when autonomy is collaterally satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 97). Jamie will later experience competence and autonomy as she understands how she has to handle things during e-learning.

Jamie also talked about the structure of how things were going during e-learning. For most students, structure is a large part of the educational process. School is built around structure. When structure is lost, students feel lost. When student's feel confident about their ability to complete task in e-learning because their competence needs are being met, they are more likely to internalize their motivation to learn and be more autonomously engaged in their studies (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

Jamie eventually found a way to get some wind in her sailboat and get some momentum going to get back on the right tack.

Eric refused to talk about his e-learning as a negative experience. He said, "It was okay," when I asked him about his overall enjoyment of the experience and any struggles. He continued,

It was an experience, but I still would rather be in-person class. Just because, like being around people, and being at home alone a lot, and just not being around a lot of people, as well as not being able to have direction, help, like right across the classroom right there. So that was kind of a little struggle, but I got adjusted to it really fast.

Instead of thinking about any other negatives the time may have posed, he recognized things it exposed. He answered “All it did for me, without me knowing it, was prepare me for college my first semester because it was online learning. It prepared me for that.” As we continued the interview, he said he had to depend on himself more for the extra help and boost to get things done when schooling moved to e-learning. “In traditional school a teacher will always be there to help guide you along the way, but in virtual learning, nobody is there. You have to put the responsibility on yourself to get it done and make sure you understand it.” Even though the responsibility was placed on him, did not always use his time wisely.

Some things that hindered me from doing my work was free time to just do whatever I wanted to do. During the time when my teacher would just give us all of the assignments and their due dates, I would procrastinate. I would push all my assignments back until they were about to be due and rush and try to get them done. This is one of the things I wish I did not do because this put a lot of stress on me, struggling to try and get it done at the last minute.

Though Eric was procrastinating to get things done, he believed he was still doing things to the best of his ability. “I believe this because all that I was learning and took notes on I

put it towards my schoolwork and received good grades and I was grasping the information and it was sticking in my mind.”

There were a few times, David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric responded that the educational structure was lacking in the e-learning environment. Much like the environmental structure, when the structure of the normal educational setting is different, it is sometimes hard to find motivation when things are not organized in a way that is easy to understand and follow. This fits with the competence component of SDT. When one does not feel effective in the interactives with the social environments and alone with one’s capabilities, intrinsic motivation is not being met (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The structure can also mean time restraint as well. School is structured within a certain amount of allotted time. During e-learning, students was finding it hard to regulate how to schedule school time. Without the support or guidance on how to create a schedule, or without the self-determination to be motivated to complete school within a certain amount of time, e-learning became a disorganized mess.

David’s, Linda’s, Jamie’s, and Eric’s responses to the questions asked on the survey, during the semi-structured interview, as well as during the group interview, provided answers to the research question how their motivation changed after the traditional environment changed to e-learning. Not being able to interact with teachers, peers, and having a lack of structure, provided insight into their change of motivation.

On the Right Tack

David eventually found his sailboat back on the right tack and in fair wind. He often mentioned his parents as motivators during both the traditional and the e-learning environment as those who helped navigate the uncharted waters. “I had a very supportive

mother behind me who was the main reason for my continued e-learning work ethic to finish high school.” During the group interview I asked all the participants who in their lives they thought motivated them to continue making academic progress. David’s response was “Both my parents have college degrees. So, I mean, I’m just pretty much following after them, I guess.”

David often needed relatedness and autonomy during e-learning. This often came in the form of parental guidance for David, which is a key component to SDT. Parental autonomy support has been found to be important for children’s internalizing a value for learning in schools and applying themselves to achievement in classroom settings (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 324). David often said that his parents were his guide for making sure he made the academic achievements he made. Even though he was capable, he just was not motivated without their support. Parents’ provision of autonomy support not only meets the child’s basic psychological needs, thus enhancing his or her wellness, but it also leads to the internalization by the child of more supportive relational styles (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 326).

David’s sailboat found stable water and he was able to guide it to on the right tack. He is doing well in college and allowing the experiences he had during e-learning help him as he navigates new learning experiences.

Even though e-learning was a struggle, Linda was not going to let it defeat her. She answered on the survey, “Yes, e-learning was a struggle, but I didn’t and still isn’t going to let that get in the way of the things I want to achieve and be the person I want to become.” Linda had the internal, defined goals that helped motivate her during the e-learning time. “There are goals I want to achieve in my lifetime and getting the proper

education is the only way I am going to achieve these goals. I am going to become a Pharmacist. My dream is to put on my white coat with the abbreviation “Dr.” in front of my name.” She stated that because this was her goal, ultimately the future was one of her motivators during e-learning. Linda found personal rewards and goals, internalized them to guide her motivation during her e-learning experience. Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that intrinsic motivation comes from within, allowing one’s natural ability to get task done to get to the reward that comes with it (p. 57). From Linda’s response, though she was less motivated by her circumstances, she allowed her natural academic abilities and personal goals to fuel her self-determination.

Not only were her goals her motivation that helped her sailboat out of troubled waters, like David, she had people in her life who also were her motivators. During the group interview when talking about who motivated them, Linda answered that her parents motivated her. “My momma motivates me because she went to school, got her nursing degree, and worked 20 years in the hospital. She makes me want to keep going because she did.” Continued on about her dad, “My dad motivates me, too, because he didn’t go to college, but he needed up having his own business selling and repairing appliances. He did it without college degrees, so I think anyone could do it.”

Today, Linda is doing well in college, and has the same work ethic she used in high school in college. She allowed her parents, teachers, and the goals she set for herself to right her sailboat and place her boat back on the right tack.

Jamie found motivation in herself and in other people during her e-learning experience. When she answered who was successful who motivated her, she said, “I guess, people older than me. But I like to make school into a competition; that might not

be the best thing.” This did not surprise me based on how she answered questions during her one-on-one interview. She continued, “When all my friends are doing better, then it makes me realized how successful they are and how easy college is going for them. Because actually trying and how I need to, like, start doing that. So, I guess like my friends, I can look up to some of them.”

Jamie also came to the realization that she did not want to graduate with grades that did not reflect her capabilities. She also realized she was getting close to the end of her senior year and had something to which to look forward—summertime, and that lifted her spirits.

At the end, I was like, ‘Well, I’m about to graduate. I have to get all this stuff done. I didn’t want C’s and D’s.’ So then I was like, ‘Well see, you’re happy again. Like it’s almost summer; you have a lot of stuff that you need to turn in.’ So then I was like, ‘Okay, now I’m motivated,’ and I wanted to wake up at 7 AM and do stuff like I was on Adderall or something. But it was just my happiness in my brain.

Jamie allowed that realization to help motivate her through her schoolwork; however, I asked for clarification to understand if summertime and her upcoming graduation were the reasons for the motivation. She provided more insight.

I felt like I had adjusted better to quarantine life than I in March, because March was a rough month. And then the second half of April, everything turned around and I was like, ‘Okay, I know what I’m doing. Now I know how to do everything. I know I’m not the only person going through this stuff.’ And that was just

another big factor—knowing that I’m not alone, even though I was lonely. You know what I mean?

As Jamie began to figure things out during e-learning, she began to figure out how to better manage her time. There were times, after she got out of her depressed state, that she got in a “zone”, as she responded to being in a zone during the e-learning experience. “Yes, there were many times where I was like, if I stop right now, I’m not gonna get anything done.” She described what it felt like. “I could write a paper, it’d be the best paper I’d ever written and I would...it would take me like 30 minutes to like, proofread, research, and everything.” She continued, “I would get all my math work done, and I was like, ‘Oh, I actually know how to do this. I just need to do it.’ And it would just be like I would get everything done. And I felt so accomplished. So, yeah, I felt there were times I felt like I was in the zone.” When she was in the zone, Jamie knew could not put off her assignments for another day, as she had been doing previously during her e-learning experience. She told me that once she started, she could not stop until the work was done. While she now had the mental strength to get her assignments done, she wanted to take the opportunity to earn better grades. She honestly had no desire to stop working once she got started. Jamie became so engrossed in her work, that she felt that she could not stop. Jamie felt like she was in a “zone” because her she was confident in her ability to do the work. This relates to competence from SDT. The need for competence leads people to seek challenges that are optimal for their capacities and to persistently attempt to maintain and enhance those skills and capacities through activity (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7).

In addition to this relating to Deci and Ryan's competence criterion, Jamie's competences and being in a zone, also relates to Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory. In flow, one loses self-consciousness, but they feel stronger than usual (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 31). In addition, flow experience acts as a magnet for learning—that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills and in it, the person is constantly growing, while enjoying whatever he or she did (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 33).

Today, Jamie is making her way through college, forming new relationships with people, still comparing herself to her peers. However, she has created new routines for herself to help her better manage her time. “What I've tried to live by lately, is do all my work from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM, and then get the rest of my time to myself. I try to do that as much as possible.” She's being successful doing that as she manages her schoolwork and a parttime job in the evenings.

Jamie eventually experiences competence and autonomy of SDT, that she had balanced in her world before the pandemic. As she experienced flow, from built competence, she confidently completed her assignments. In doing autonomous regulation, in which the true self is experienced as the source of action, action tendencies work in a synergistic fashion, and executive or ego energy is available for engagement without being used for self-awareness or conscious control (Skinner & Edge, 2002, p. 324).

Eric had an “entire crew” helping to guide his sailboat during e-learning. Eric said his community was very supportive and motivated him often. I asked him how. “They [coaches, family members, church members] would stop by or call to see how I was doing, and make sure I was okay. They motivated me to just keep going; it was going to

get better.” However, when it came to successful people who motivated Eric the most, it would be his parents. “My dad didn’t go to college and was successful without a college degree. My mom was successful with a college degree. It motivates me. Both of them motivates me just to let them see me make it.”

Additionally, the way that Eric got over how he struggled with time management was by thinking about words his parents would tell him about getting assignments done. “Something my parents told me, ‘If you go ahead and get it done early, then you’ll have extra time to either look over it or think about it more.’ And then I just remembered that, and it just made me just strive more to get more done.” His remembrance of his parents’ words also enabled him to get in a zone at times, as he completed his assignments. His response to the question about ever getting in a zone during e-learning, was, “Oh, yes, ma’am; I got into a zone. ‘Cuz maybe when I used to procrastinate and have like 2 assignments and ended up doing them, but I’ll do like 3 more after that, because I’d be in such a good zone. I mean, such a good flow of doing my work.” Eric also experienced a level of confidence in his ability to do his assignments, which allowed him to experience competence as related to Deci and Ryan’s SDT. Competence is a felt sense of confidence one’s action (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7). In Eric’s need to finish assignments, this experience seems appropriate, if he needed to avoid distractions to finish his tasks.

In addition to experiencing being in a zone, from Deci and Ryan’s perspective of competence, it also follows that Eric’s experience would relate to Flow Theory. In flow, Csikszentmihalyi state that when the experience beings, a concentration happens and one becomes so focused, that eventually one steps outside of everyday reality and is restricted by the activity (VIAStrengths, 2010, Timestamp 0:00-1:51).

External goals also guided Eric's sails. While he was home doing his work, he knew that he could not slack off, so he made sure that while he was heeding the words of his parents, he also was looking forward to graduation even though there was uncertainty about whether or not there would be a ceremony. "Even though we were in between if we were going to graduate or not, like was we gonna walk or not, I still wanted to make sure I passed the 12th grade and got my high school diploma." He continued by saying, "If I slacked off over when we had online learning, I wouldn't have got my diploma. And the main focus was walking, I mean, walking in just like a ceremony to have like just to show like what I have accomplished, but the main goal is the diploma." He said that was what motivated him even more. "It motivated me, even more, to keep doing my work and keep making good grades." Eric's goal was more extrinsically motivated, as he wanted to get his diploma, so he knew he had to make good grades. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside influences and is motivated by an external control (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Eric is currently using all he learned during e-learning as he navigates college life in preparation to become a mathematics teacher. He is also able to use his time to play intramural tennis and is successful while playing. If able, he wants to see if he can join the basketball team as a walk-on as well.

As David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric navigate the seas of the pandemic, none of them could make it without the various relationships in their lives. In the end, it was those who mattered most, that helped them when they were struggling to find motivation, who pushed them to get back on track with their education and remember their goals so that they could get to where they needed to be. These relationships met the psychological need of relatedness as referred to in SDT. All the participants felt a part of the

membership of family “marina”. SDT states that by feeling connected to close others and by being a significant member of social groups, people experience relatedness and belonging, through contributing to the group or showing benevolence (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11).

Having a good support system that tenderly encourages students while they are pursuing goals, both intrinsic and extrinsic is motivational to students during e-learning. The responses provided here in the narratives of David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric show that they felt connected to someone, cared for, and had a sense of belonging with other individuals, or with the community (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). Though tasks seem daunting, students who have examples of successful people in their lives who have taken paths that they are now embarking on, or someone who is encouraging them, can motivate them that they are worthy of the cause.

Each of them also found that even though they were outside of their educational norm, they found structure that worked for them. SDT states that when environments are low in structure, and thus unpredictable or chaotic, children will not feel in control of outcomes and are likely to feel ineffective (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 326). Provision of structure is critical to helping children develop a sense of control understanding and perceived competence, which become the basis for effective functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 327). In all, a well-organized environment contributes to perceived competence, which in return builds student’s need for autonomy, as well as relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 328).

All the participants provided external and internal factors that influenced their motivation to complete assignments during e-learning, providing insight into another

research question. Students were often motivated by goals: graduation, future plans of who they would become, or doing making good grades. In addition, participants were motivated by their parents, community members, or peers who continued to push them directly or indirectly. Jamie allowed her peers to indirectly motivated her by using them as competition to fuel her determination. David, Linda, and Eric had people motivating them directly.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of the data collected from the study, attempting to provide insight and answers to the following questions: How does changing to an e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments? In addition, other questions that followed were:

1. What external or internal factors influenced motivation to complete assignments during e-learning?
2. How can teachers change the structure of e-learning to better support student's motivation to complete assignments?

The participants provided insight into e-learning experiences and motivation through a survey, semi-structured interview, and group interview discussion. In doing so, they provided evidence for themes to support the theory of Self-Determination and its components: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Relationships, structure, and environments are key components to education, and when disrupted cause chaos that disrupt the educational flow for students. These themes that emerged through the narrations of the participants, showed similarities and differences in their lives as they all navigated the journey of e-learning through a pandemic.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This narrative inquiry study examined the motivation during e-learning of students whose lives changed due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19. This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, reflections, recommendations for practitioners, the study's limitations, as well as recommendations for future research. This chapter will also conclude with a summary.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study sought to understand the motivational factors of recent high school honors graduates whose learning environment changed to e-learning, due to a pandemic, during a school year. Their narratives were collected in the form of a survey, semi-structured interviews, and a group interview. The problem of practice is that in modern history, there has been no pandemic that has drastically altered the way of life like COVID-19. As a result, K-12 education was forced to modify its instruction to require students to work in the e-learning environment. The research on this motivating this demographic of students in this educational environment is limited while under these circumstances. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following:

Research Questions

How does changing to an e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments? In addition, other questions that followed were:

1. What external or internal factors influenced motivation to complete assignments during e-learning?

2. How can teachers change the structure of e-learning to better support student's motivation to complete assignments?

Qualitative methods were used to answer these questions, as this action research was conducted as narrative inquiry to allow participants to share their experiences with motivation and e-learning.

Looking Back Through the Storm

David's, Linda's, Jamie's, and Eric's sailboats have many stories they can tell as they can look back and see how they navigated the storms with the help of their crew or motivations.

I asked all the participants during the group interview how they were able to get through and survived the time better than some of their peers, as I knew that some of my other students had other struggles that they may not have known about. David said that he was blessed to have all the resources he needed during the time of e-learning, but while in college the "playing field" seemed more even in terms of resources. He said that all the classmates he knew graduated from high school, and that even though he went to college, college was not for everyone.

Linda said she, too, was blessed to have all the resources she needed during e-learning. "Another thing is that my parents didn't stop working because the pandemic started, so they still had their income coming in. That didn't affect us as it might have some of my peers." I thought this was a valid point, as I knew for some my other students this was not the case and had caused an academic burden for them.

During the discussion, Jamie realized she had things that she had taken for granted that maybe others needed, that possibly could have helped them during their time with e-learning during the pandemic, or just in general.

I feel like I'm really lucky to have a lot of things that some students might not have, like reliable Internet, places I can go, and parents who can help me out if I need it. I know a lot of people don't have that. So I think that's one thing I need to be more thankful for and appreciate more and put it to use.

I asked the participants about their "presence" during e-learning and was it similar to that of the traditional school setting. None of them said it was felt, mainly because there were no meetings. David said, "Maybe if we had a meeting it might have helped for us to have a 'presence' with our teachers, to be 'seen', but for the most part, communication was lacking." Eric agreed. Linda commented. "But I still feel like our presence wasn't there. It just wasn't the same."

I later asked students how teachers could have better supported students, or what they as students need from their teachers during the e-learning experience. David believed that what would have helped his sailboat more during the time would have been to have more structured class times and fewer educational platforms. "For whatever reason, we didn't do the Zoom things. I mean, it would have sucked; I would have hated to do it, but I feel like it would have been better if we just had the same class times we usually had just on Zoom." He suggested that having a set time for class would have helped to motivate him to do his work during e-learning.

I think it's important to have a set time to get to class. When you go to regular class, you get there whenever; you leave whenever. On e-learning, like there's no

real timeframe; so I had no reason to do anything at a certain time. And so, it wouldn't motivate me to actually do schoolwork, because I'd go the whole day without even realizing I didn't do the work I was supposed to do.

This was a reasonable statement. Eric and Jamie had also expressed that they had trouble with time management during e-learning. Eric made the comment, "Just dealing with a lot of free time to do things besides school. I kept pushing my work back without a set time, and then a whole day would go by until, I had too much work to turn in at once." Jamie suggested classes could be placed on a schedule rather than for her to have the freedom she had over her schedule as she did during her e-learning experience.

David felt like teachers did not care as much about instruction during e-learning, and this could have been done differently. David responded, "I mean, the way it was set up, you know, they just post some stupid little worksheet. I mean, there was nothing I needed from them, because they were just as lazy as they could be, too." Linda disagreed. She answered directly after David, as he said, that he felt that they were doing nothing for him.

I really wouldn't say that about my teachers, because with the classes I was taking, we had to basically end up wrapping up IB assignments. I felt like their support didn't change because a lot of my teachers gave us their numbers. We basically contacted them anytime we needed them. So I don't think their support changed for us.

As Jamie navigated her sailboat, and found ways to keep herself on tack, she was the only participant who mentioned the need for other motivations from school and/or the district for her and her classmates during e-learning. "I think e-learning is hard enough as

it is, but if there was a bigger incentive for each student besides grades, and classes were made fun and interesting I would have been more motivated.” This statement from Jamie was understandable, considering her personality, her interactions with others, and what she found motivating before e-learning began. Students were looking forward to prom, a yearbook signing party, a traditional graduation (which they did get), College Acceptance Day celebration, Class Day (Senior Awards and Recognition Day), and so much more. It had all been swept away to sea, like a tidal wave that had overtaken a dock, and all chances of getting it back, had vanished.

When I asked for final comments about their experiences from e-learning during the group interview, David’s response was, “You know my answer, Ms. Deas. I’ve got to say, we should all be on one platform, because it was a pain in the [rear]. That would have been my thing.”

Eric said that he wished the teachers were more prepared. “They were just as lost as we were and going on the fly. Yes, they didn’t know what they probably were going to give us the next week. They were really playing it by ear.” I explained how we left on a Friday one day and we never went back. The teachers did go back in on the following Monday and was told that we were to make assignments for each class that would last for at least two weeks, but that was the only guideline. I apologized to them by saying, “On behalf of the teachers, we’re sorry for how poorly it was made, but that’s how it went.” Jamie said, “We forgive you”, while David said, “No, we don’t”. We all had a chuckle over it.

I also asked them how the experience changed or added to their life. Jamie said, “I’ve learned I can teach myself how to learn in different ways. It’s something I didn’t think I’d be able to do.”

Eric said that it changed his point-of-view of learning and gave him another look into the education system. As someone who is one day looking to become a future educator, this is a great observation. “This prepared me more for college because this gave me a glimpse into what my college classes are like. It has been an adjustment, but if I hadn’t experienced e-learning in high school, it would have been an even bigger adjustment.”

Linda also commented that the e-learning experience gave her a new perspective on learning.

This taught me new learning point-of-views, because being in college, I realize that it’s really up to me to learn the material. It’s not like in high school when the teachers are constantly going over the material. The professors, they go over it once, and then after that, it’s up to us to learn it. That’s going to be with e-learning or with in-person classes.

In David’s, Linda’s, Jamie’s, and Eric’s reflections of their time during e-learning, they were able to find positive meaning from their experience and use it in their future endeavors. Understanding that they needed structure both in their environment, instructional platform, and time, showed them ways they could be adjust, be successful, and use what they learned about themselves in their collegiate studies.

Summary and Discussion

This study focused on understanding the motivating factors of students during e-learning and how teachers can support students during the e-learning environment. The analysis of the findings from the narratives of the participants were viewed through the lens of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory.

Primary Research Question Findings

How does changing to an e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments?

The first research question examined the change in honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments when the learning environment changed to e-learning. Listening to the responses of the participants through their interviews and the group interview, as well as reading the responses of the participants through the survey, participants continuously indicated that when their social interactions were taken away, it caused them to lose motivation. Linda responded, "Not being able to interact with fellow classmates and friends had an impact on my lack of motivation." This sentiment was echoed more than once by the other participants, not only their interactions with their peers, but their interactions with their teachers as well. Vygotsky's (1978) theory states that social interaction and community plays a vital role in the process of making meaning. For students, in the traditional learning environment, they are able to have a teacher or peer readily available to ask for clarification, or to collaborate on assignments. According to SDT, the participants were lacking the basic relatedness need, having a sense of belonging both with other individuals and with one's community (Ryan & Deci,

2002, p. 7). David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric often said that the e-learning environment lacked this element that the traditional environment offered.

Another finding for this research question is that the environmental structure needed to be organized and inviting to students to want to learn in the e-learning environment. The participants often said that the lack of time scheduled for classes affected their motivation during e-learning. They craved the daily routine of classes. Maybe this was the one sense of normalcy that would have been a constant in their lives had this part of their lives stayed the same and would have helped them adjust to the upheaval that was happening around them. David said at one point that he would have hated having a specific time for classes, but for him, it would have helped him to have his classes at the same time every day. What David was experiencing was a lack of structure in autonomy support from SDT. This means that autonomy support is permissive, neglectful, or has a laissez-faire interaction style (i.e., the teacher lets students do whatever they want) (Reeve, 2002, p. 193). Teachers were unintentionally doing this because they were unfamiliar with the structure of e-learning environment. Furthermore, Reeve (2002) states that if students had been given structure, they would have been given clear expectations, optimal challenges, and timely and informative feedback as they attempted to make progress in living up to those expectations and challenges (p. 193).

Secondary Research Question 1 Findings

What external or internal factors influenced motivation to complete assignments during e-learning?

This question looked at the external and internal motivation factors that were helpful for students during the e-learning environment. Students are often motivated by

goals. To reach those goals, they sometimes needed the social interaction and collaboration of those around them. They needed support from family, peers, and teachers. Support comes in different forms, and in the e-learning environment, that is drastically different than the environment they are used to doing school in, they needed the structured support of familiar relationships.

While supporting those goals, the motivation comes from intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, as Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory. Motivators came in the form of grades, future plans, or people in the participant's lives. Furthermore, Flow Theory, has a component that ties in with intrinsic motivation that one is so involved and in deep concentration with a task, that the instant feedback they are receiving as a benefit of flow, is meeting a competency need found in the Theory Self-Determination. As a result, students continue to push through their assignments, eventually accomplishing internal or external goals they have set for themselves. As students became more competent in their flow experience, they also fulfil the need for autonomy, also found in Self-Determination Theory, to continue in their learning experience.

Secondary Research Question 2 Findings

How can teachers change the structure of e-learning to better support student's motivation to complete assignments?

This question examined how teachers could best support students in the e-learning environment. Students expressed they needed to know that their presence was important to their teacher during e-learning just like it would be during traditional school. This could be enhanced by having schedule class times. With that acknowledgement, students have the relationship motivation support that is a part of Self-Determination Theory.

Relationship motivation explains high-quality relationships are characterized by both the giving and receiving of autonomy and relatedness satisfaction (Reeve et al., 2018, pp. 23-24). Other relationships such as peers and parents were also important to students during this time and were necessary in their motivation during the e-learning environment, as evident in their responses. They often said that they missed being able to have their, teacher, friends and/or peers readily near to ask questions when needed.

In e-learning, the organization of the educational structure was just as important as it was in the traditional school environment. Students became less motivated in a non-structured environment because it seemed meaningless or seemed as if it was not as important. Students indicated needing set times, such as what is provided for them in the traditional school, to help with motivation during e-learning.

Implications

This study explored the motivation of honors students during e-learning during an unprecedented circumstance, a pandemic caused by COVID-19. This study exposed that it can be implied that honors students view school as a sort of “safe-haven”, a place that is constant in their lives and when life is disrupted, or becomes chaotic, school is the one place they want to stay uninterrupted and viewed as “normal”. This, again, goes back to the structure that students find valuable, even though sometimes, they think they do not need it. The participants realized that when the structure that was in place was removed, it actually made them uncomfortable, and they wanted and need it in both the aspect of time and location.

Another implication from this study is that in the on-line, or virtual educational setting for the honors student, they need the teacher-student relationship to be built in

such a unique way that they feel confident and connected, just as they do in the traditional setting. Participants often said that in the virtual setting they felt like they were not “seen”, therefore, they felt disconnected from the relationships they built in the traditional school setting.

Building these relationships can be helped when teachers implement consistent class meeting times on one platform for students to feel “seen”, and actually be a part of a class with other students. In this way, students are continuing to with some sort of normalcy as they navigate the virtual setting.

Action Plan for the Classroom

This study showed that there are areas that I can improve my practice. Participants expressed that there were important people in their lives who helped to motivate them during their lives—before the pandemic, as they navigated the pandemic, and after they found their footing after they adjusted to the pandemic. Therefore, it would be important for me to improve parent/guardian involvement to help students with their motivation throughout the school year, both in the traditional setting and in the virtual setting.

To keep students more motivated to be interested in their academic studies, provide more incentives than grades. Students look forward to doing things that involve motivating them that involve more than grades. Grades do not seem to motivate all students; if they did, more students would more likely earn high grades.

Additionally, in the virtual setting, it is important for students to be assigned meaningful assignments. Participants often mentioned that due to the perception that time seem unlimited due to it not being contained within the hours of the regular hours of the school day, teachers often gave more assignments than would have normally been given.

It is important that students believe and understand that their assignments are meeting their academic needs, and that they are worthwhile. This would help with their motivation to work on their assignments, get them done within a reasonable amount of time, and it does not overload them with unnecessary activity.

Recommendations for Practice and Practitioners

Motivating students is what teachers do to make sure that they are meeting the needs of their students. With the recent events of COVID-19, it seemed to have become increasingly more challenging to motivate students and encourage them in their educational endeavors. Some reasons may be lack of structure in the home, lack of resources, or loss of important relationships; however, but it is still imperative that as educators we tap into what motivates and drives them to succeed and provide a way to incite them to want to learn.

First, building relationships in the e-learning environment is just as important as it is in the traditional environment. Students do not physically have your presence and often students rely on that safety. If a student is experiencing a teacher for the first time, they are not sure if the teacher truly cares or not. They may be able to see the teacher through a video, but it may not be enough to build the same type of relationship normally built in a traditional learning environment. The teacher building a relationship with their parent/guardian is also important in this environment and is necessary to help make students successful. To build these relationships, find out their interests, what and/or who is important in their lives, what motivates them, even if it is extrinsic rewards, and occasionally reward it, if it is reasonable.

Second, communication is important in this environment. Clear, precise communication is necessary to make sure students understand the expectations necessary for success in the course. Provide visual and auditory communication of what is expected: announcements, schedules, and assignments. This helps keep students motivated, organized, and can be aware of what is to come.

Organization and structure are also important for students in this environment. Though teachers have no control over the platform being used if provided by the institution, it makes it easier for students to learn in one main educational platform. If a teacher is using other instructional tools for learning, organize them in a way that is helpful to students (i.e. create username and passwords sheets, if necessary). Another organization factor for e-learning is time management; making sure classes are synchronous for students as often as possible, to help students get into a routine for learning.

Do not be afraid to ask for help and collaborate with colleagues. Sometimes sharing ideas on what is working or not working may help change the dynamic of the e-learning environment. It is important to remember that no child is the same. The motivations of one does not fit the motivations of all.

Limitations

In any research there are limitations. The first being that my sample size is small. There were a few reasons for this. I did not teach a lot of seniors that year, and the sample only consisted of a specific academic demographic. Therefore, the findings of this research, may not be generalized to the entire population of secondary students. However, the study does include diverse ethnic and gender backgrounds.

Another limitation is that this study was conducted during the pandemic, so all interactions with participants was electronic. When conducting interviews in person being able to see facial expressions, body movements, and other reactions, would have helped add to the narratives. Since the cameras were off during the interviews and during the group interview, I was not able to get this element of their narrations.

Not having current high school students for use of this research study due to the pandemic and the unsurety the study may not be approved based on the status of how the district was structuring school was also a limitation. When this study first started, the district was not approving studies to be conducted because students, though in the e-learning environment, were not in traditional school setting.

The final limitation is that the participants being college students retelling their students from their last semester of high school a few months later is also a limitation because at times, they shared experiences that they were currently experiencing. Even though they kept their responses as relatable to their high school experiences, their more recent experiences could have colored some of their responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of my study could be corrected through future research. One, I would recommend having current high school students share their motivations, frustrations, and provide suggestions of what could work in this environment. I would also suggest a more improved method of inquiry questions and/or methods.

I also suggest research on the motivation of students who are not honors students and looking into students from Latino and Hispanic backgrounds. I taught many students from this demographic, and during the beginning of the pandemic, the e-learning

environment caused them to disappear. Is it because of the language barrier? Or because they had to work in family business?

I suggest research on students who are not motivated during school, and then found themselves in the e-learning environment, and then excelled.

Additionally, I suggest research on honors students, who were complete opposites of the honors students in this research study. Some students I taught in traditional school, they excelled, but when e-learning began, they stopped working all together.

I also suggest a research study on teacher motivation during e-learning and he/her effect on student motivation during e-learning.

Reflection in the Water

Motivation. This is how I started; with this one simple word. But is it so simple? No, it is not. It is quite complicated in nature and can go down many avenues if one allows it to lead it through its many paths. There was so much to learn; so much to learn about myself, David, Linda, Jamie, and Eric. There was so much to learn about my past, my former students, and still so much more to continue to learn about my future students as time evolves.

When it comes to motivation and my classroom, I need to understand what motivates my students either internally or externally. I also need to make sure that their basic psychological needs of autonomy, acting on one's own behavior; competence, having a sense of confidence in one's action; and relatedness, feeling connected to others are being met, in class settings, showing them how they can maintain these same needs outside of my classroom. These needs can be met by making sure I have structure in my classroom by setting clear, precise expectations, but also allowing them the freedom to

challenge themselves, express themselves, and provide a safe space for student perspective. Providing students with choice of tasks allows students to choose what they want to complete, while also allowing them to choose what they confident they are able to complete.

Lastly, building teacher-student relationships to meet the relatedness need. In-person, this is easier to do, but virtually, has been a more difficult task. Building relationships virtually to help students feel motivated to want to participate, requires more than grades as motivators. Therefore, I agree with Jamie's assessment that there should be more incentives besides grades as motivators, especially in the virtual world. I will be looking for more ways to incentivize my students to participate, as well as build stronger relationships with them virtually.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative, narrative inquiry study explored the motivation of honors student when the educational environment changed to e-learning. In doing so, it attempted to fill the gap in K-12 research about student motivation in e-learning during a pandemic. To understand their motivation, the primary question, "How did changing to e-learning environment change an honors student's motivation to complete high school assignments", while understanding their types of motivations, as well as how their teachers could motivate them was answered. The theoretical lens Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provided the vision in which to gauge how students viewed their motivation, motivating factors, and the support needed to be successful in the e-learning environment.

Data suggested that students needed relationships, structure, and goals to maintain effective motivation during e-learning. Without these motivators in the e-learning environment, students found that they struggled, because those motivators were necessary in the traditional school environment. My study supported what claims of social constructivist suggestions, that it is important to have collaborative learning opportunities, be it through teamwork with peers or through collaboration with an instructor. In doing so, this allows students to stay connected, have a social presence, and be involved in their learning. Furthermore, while students are getting their needs met socially, maybe they are also being motivated to continue their learning through self-determination, occasionally experience moments of flow, as they are intrinsically motivated to press towards goals.

I provided recommendation for other educators who may be looking for ways to motivate their students while teaching in the e-learning environment. Not all students are motivated by the same things, in the same ways. It is important for educators to build relationships with their students to learn what motivates them. The e-learning environment can be a viable learning environment for both teacher and student if the time and effort in on both ends to make the experience a success.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF CONSENT/INVITATION LETTER

Dear XXXXX School District XXXXX Graduate:

I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at the College of Education at University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina.

A major part of my program is to complete an action research study. This study will focus on the impact changing to the e-learning environment have on honors students' motivation to complete school assignments during the pandemic of 2020. As you are a recent XXXXX School District XXXXX graduate, I am interested in your input and requesting your permission to use your experiences as data measures for input in this study.

As a recent graduate, you are being asked to participate and have your experiences contribute to this study.

- This study will be looking at spring 2020 semester.
- Your participation would mean that you would agree to have your data contributed anonymously. From the beginning of the study, until the end, any name used, class, or students will not be personally identified.
- All data will be stripped of personal identifiers (name, class, school, etc.), and given a pseudonym so your privacy is ensured. At any time, if you decide you do not wish to contribute to this study, you may request removal. There is no penalty for non-participation or withdraw.
- The information obtained for this study will be gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and group interview. The interview will be conducted one-on-one, while the group interview will contain 3-5 participants. Others in the group will hear your answers during the group interview session(s). It cannot be promised that what you say will remain completely private, but it is asked that you and other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

You may contact me at xxx-xxx-xxx or xxxxxxxx if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your consideration.

With kind regards,



Tyesha Deas

- I agree to participate and to contribute to the body of data gathered for this action research study. I understand that I will not be personally identified at any time before, during, or after this study is completed and that my data will be kept completely anonymous. I also understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time, and in order to participate I must be at least age eighteen and a recent XXXXX School District XXXXX Graduate.

I do not want to participate in the study.

Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

**APPENDIX B: PERSONAL HISTORY ON MOTIVATION AND LEARNING
SURVEY**

* Required

1. First Name Only *
2. Tell me about yourself. Include the history of your interest in school, learning, and typically, how you are as a student. *
3. In the normal, or traditional school environment, are you motivated to learn? *
4. When traditional school was closed and moved to e-learning for the pandemic in Spring of 2020, how was your motivation to learn? Explain. *
5. Did your motivation to learn differ, or stay the same, during e-learning than traditional learning? Explain. *
6. What was, or who, was behind the motivation to learn during e-learning? Explain. (If there was more than one motivator, provide all motivators) *
7. Were there things that hindered you from doing your schoolwork in a timely manner while e-learning? Explain. *
8. Do you think you were doing your assignments to the best of your ability? Why or why not? *
9. Tell me any other thing about that time you think would be beneficial to understanding your motivation, or lack of motivation, during e-learning. *

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank the participant for taking the time to interview and share their story about their experience with their education motivation and e-learning during the pandemic. Inform them that the interview will be recorded for use later, but will contain any identifying information, nor be shared with others.

Researcher: Unique to each interview, review the answers from the questionnaire of each interviewee, and ask any clarifying questions from the responses given.

1. Most honors students are viewed as go-getters, highly motivated, conscientious about their studies. In the traditional school environment, before the pandemic, would you view yourself as this type of student?
2. In the traditional school setting, did you enjoy school? What aspects did you enjoy?
3. *A. If interviewee answers no, they are most likely motivated by extrinsic forces. No, why not? What motivated you to work hard, earn high grades to be a student in honors classes?*

B. If interviewee answers yes, they are most likely motivated by intrinsic forces. Yes? Why do you enjoy school? What motivated you to excel and do well in your studies?
4. The pandemic of 2020 really changed the way we do things, especially education. During your last semester of high school, you had to move to e-learning environment for schooling. Tell me about this experience. Did you enjoy the e-learning environment?
5. Did the motivating factors you used in the traditional learning environment, continue to help you in the e-learning environment? Why or why not?
6. Did you have all the resources you needed to be successful in the e-learning environment? Reliable wifi, books, etc? (even resources you thought you needed that were unique to you, quiet area to work in, etc)
7. Was there a time while you were working on assignments that you ever feel you were in a “zone”? Explain.
8. Ask about graduation and finishing school in the final year of schooling.

9. Was what was happening with the pandemic, or COVID-19 causing you stressing during e-learning?
10. What additional information can you share about your time spent in e-learning and your experience that was not shared here?

APPENDIX D: GROUP INTERVIEW

1. If you know my story behind my dissertation, you know that I have struggled to find the motivation to complete it. Many times, I have felt like giving up and quitting. I see you all in our current situation with COVID-19 and the pandemic. How are you making sense of the world right now and allowing what you know now to keep you from giving up? What keeps you going?
2. Some students have not been able to have the same opportunities as you have during this pandemic. How are you getting through this better than most others? How are you surviving this time with your education more so than some others?
3. Is there anyone in your life who you think is successful who has motivated you to continue going?
4. Humans are social beings, even if one is more introverted than other. In the traditional learning environment, it is said that students have a “presence” or are “seen” by your teachers. Did you still believe this was the case after e-learning began? Did it affect your motivation?
5. It was mentioned several times that the support from your teachers changed because learning changed to e-learning. Communication electronically is different than the normal way of communicating in-person. What instructional support did you need from your teachers while in the e-learning environment?
6. Overall, if the experience with e-learning could have happened again, what would you have liked to have happened differently, or what would have made it a better experience?