
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Graduate Students' Motivational Factors and Educational Performance in Pursuance of Higher Education during COVID-19 Pandemic

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| ABSTRACT

The descriptive study aimed to determine the motivational factors and educational performance of graduate students in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a survey questionnaire, data were gathered from 140 students pursuing a master's degree in a private higher educational institution in the Philippines during the School Year 2021-2022, which served as the final respondents of the study. Results revealed that the student's motivational factors during the pandemic were described as having much influence while most of the respondents obtained their educational performance in their master's degree as very good. Motivational factors were significantly correlated to the educational performance of the respondents based on their GWA. The study suggests that students should be motivated to pursue graduate education, especially in the dimension of social stimulation. Graduate school professors should also understand and be able to assess the degree of motivation of their students in their every-week classes, in which they will be able to contribute affirmations, inspiration, and drive to their students. Further, it is also recommended that students must be inspired to excel and obtain excellent grades in their graduate education.

| KEYWORDS

Motivational factors, educational performance, master's degree, online learning

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on tertiary schools such as universities, colleges, and private higher educational institutions, which closed their campuses to students and has allowed limited personnel in compliance with lockdown measures (Velasco, 2021). UNESCO recommends distance learning programs and open educational applications during a school closure caused by COVID-19 so that schools and teachers use to teach their pupils and bound the interruption of education. Therefore, many educational institutions go for online classes (Shehzadi et al., 2020). Even though some of the educators were not tech-savvy, they updated themselves to battle unexpected circumstances (Pillai et al., 2021). The online learning regulation is in force in all educational institutions. It is undertaken the learning from traditionally face-to-face approaches to online platforms. Teachers and students are regulated to conduct the teaching and learning processes from face-to-face mode into online one (Gustiani, 2020). Moreover, online learning is in the form of virtual communication among teachers-students, students-students which results in a vast capacity for sharing information and experience (Pakpahan & Fitriani, 2020; Rochman & Pertiwi, 2020). Thus, the advantages and disadvantages of online learning made students motivated to continue their education, particularly those students pursuing graduate education.

Motivation in an achievement setting can be conceived of in terms of either the strength or the direction of motivation. People can differ in their level of motivation as well in their orientation of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation can be defined as goals that individuals pursue when they engage in various activities. Studies examining the motivations of distance education

among students have increased in the last decade, and findings have shown that successful students are often intrinsically motivated (Stevens & Switzer, 2006; Wighting, Liu, & Rovai, 2008).

In a study on motivation in e-learning courses, it was found that the intrinsic motivation components of exploration, curiosity and an interest in collaboration were keys to successful learning in an online environment (Martens, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2007). Online courses provide the opportunity to learn independently and be autonomous, which may more directly match the needs of a student that is intrinsically motivated. Rienties et al. (2009) also reported that students contributed to online learning discussions differently based on whether their motivation was intrinsic or extrinsic. Results from their study showed that intrinsically motivated students were higher contributors to online discussions in distance learning classes than externally motivated participants. There is very limited research on the motivations of graduate students in distance education, but Butcher and Sieminski (2006) explored this narrowly in a study of distance education doctoral students.

Thus, this study aimed to find out the motivational factors and educational performance of students, particularly in the graduate studies who pursue their post-graduate education despite the pandemic.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivation Factors

According to Brockett (2008), the incidence of adults seeking continuing education has been associated with transitions in life. These transitional events may prompt adults to seek education in order to cope with life changes or find a new direction. Job-related transitions are frequently cited as the motivation for an adult to pursue continuing education. Other life changes identified as reasons to continue education are divorce, family problems, health issues, parenthood, or retirement.

Additionally, Van Etten et al. (2008) studied the motivation of college seniors and found that receiving a degree was the highest rated academic motivation, indicating their focus on how a college education would impact future goals. Earning good grades was also ranked as a significant motivation, particularly for the students planning to apply to graduate school. These participants also reported increased motivation when they believed they had choices in their course work and when they felt what they were learning would be beneficial to them in real life.

Moreover, Cosman- Ross, and Hiatt – Michael (2005) reported that adult college students were primarily motivated by self-improvement and a sense of achievement. The results of their study showed that intrinsic motivators were rated higher than external motivators for all of the participants.

Based on Kao et al. (2011), in a study of motivations of teachers in web-based development programs, enhancement of teaching practice was rated as the most important motivator, with occupational promotion and external expectations ranked in second and third place. While Wong (2014) explored the motivational factors of working practitioners pursuing professional doctoral programs, which are former and current DPS – IM students at Syracuse University, School of Information Studies. This research utilized semi-structured interviews of twenty-one DPS – IM students (80.77% participation); collected data revealed that the majority of the participants were working professionals who have been in their field for at least 10 years. The interview revealed that self-cultivation was found to be the greatest motivational factor for this study group, followed by self-improvement, self-transformation, and a sense of responsibility, which are all supported by Confucian learning philosophy found in the Great Learning.

In addition, Van Rhijn et al. (2016) concluded that self-determination is the main factor influencing adult students to return to higher education. The literature suggested that graduate education may be an important factor. Motivated people are stimulated to successfully achieve a goal or a degree of qualification in their professions (Mohamadi, 2006).

The reasons given by students in undertaking their graduate studies are the desire for knowledge, desire to do research, desire to benefit others through their work, desire to teach in higher education, and career-related reasons (Atkinson et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the study by Cathro (2011) suggested that with any change, both driving forces (motivators) and restraining forces (barriers) are involved and have an impact on the change process. The driving forces must outweigh the restraining forces that would lead individuals to pursue graduate education.

2.2 Educational Performance

Educational performance refers to the academic performance of students, which was measured using their general weighted average. Numerous researches have been conducted in the area of students' academic performance, including graduate education level (Shoukat et al., 2013). A study conducted by Yaseen et al. (2021) showed that the overall trend of academic performance among students in higher education remains as consistent as if they were in a regular class setting. Moreover, for students who

continue semesters using an online platform, the dedication to their academic performance reflects that their grade point average has also remained constantly high. Results also revealed that the majority of students either disagree or strongly disagree that in an online learning setting, they are able to study effectively, understand their professors, write a reflection, reaction, and term papers with confidence, do well in the exam and achieve the grades they want.

3. Methodology

The study focused on the motivational factors and educational performance of 140 students who were enrolled for their post-graduate degree during the School Year 2021 - 2022. The research site is a private higher education institution (HEI) situated in Central Luzon.

A descriptive method of research was employed with a checklist to gather the data. Statistical treatment of data gathered was limited using the weighted mean and Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Motivational Factors of the Respondents

Relative to the motivational factors of the respondents, it obtained an overall mean of 3.60, described as much influence. The result implies that the factors of motivation such as communication improvement (3.98), social contact (4.00), educational preparation (3.57), professional advancement (3.92), family togetherness (3.00), social stimulation (2.70), and cognitive interest (4.00) greatly influence the respondents' motive to pursue and finished their post-graduate degree despite the pandemic. It also indicates that the respondents wanted to develop strong communication skills in conjunction with the development of critical thinking abilities, which should occur in distinct phases during a graduate career (Parker 2012). In addition, they also want to meet different and new people and become acquainted with them. Moreover, respondents recognized the need to make up for a narrow previous education, to get the education they missed earlier in life, to acquire knowledge to help with other educational courses and to prepare for further education. Findings also revealed that it is a necessity for them to secure professional advancement, achieve an occupational goal, prepare for getting a better job, give them a higher status in their job, and increase their job competence. Furthermore, they also want something meaningful out of life, to acquire general knowledge, and to expand their mind.

However, respondents identified moderate influence on their family togetherness which is a happy feeling of affection and closeness to family. Likewise, they also attended graduate education to overcome the frustration of day-to-day living, to get away from loneliness, to get relief from boredom, to get a break in the routine of home or work, to do something rather than nothing, and, to escape an unhappy relationship.

The reasons given by students in undertaking their graduate studies are the desire for knowledge, desire to do research, desire to benefit others through their work, desire to teach in higher education, and career-related reasons (Atkinson, 2004). Furthermore, the study by Cathro (2011) suggested that motivators must outweigh the barriers that would lead individuals to pursue graduate education.

Table 1. Motivational Factors of the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Description
Communication Improvement	3.60	Much Influence
Social Contact	3.50	Much Influence
Educational Preparation	3.40	Much Influence
Professional Advancement	3.70	Much Influence
Family Togetherness	2.90	Moderate Influence
Social Stimulation	2.70	Moderate Influence
Cognitive Interest	3.70	Much Influence
Over-all Mean	3.40	Much Influence

Legend: 3.20 - 4.00 – Much Influence
2.40 - 3.19 – Moderate Influence
1.60 – 2.39 – Little Influence
1.00 – 1.59 – No Influence

4.2 Educational Performance

The educational performance of the respondents was based on their grades in basic courses, major subjects, and cognates subjects. Fewer than half (40.71%) of the respondents have the general weighted average (GWA) range of 91 – 93/ 1.76 – 1.50 (very good). There were 34.29 percent who got a GWA range of 88 – 90/ 2.01 – 1.75 (good), followed by a small number (15.71%) who measured 85 – 87/ 2.26 – 2.00 (good) in their GWA range. Fourth, there was 8.57 percent who attained 94 – 96/ 1.51 – 1.25 (very good); lastly,

there was 0.71 percent who got 97 – 100/ 1.00 -1.24 (excellent) in the GWA range. This implied that the majority of the respondents showed exemplary performance in their graduate schools, as pictured from their obtained general weighted average (GWA). According to Yasen et al., (2021) majority of the students either disagree or strongly disagree that in an online learning setting, they are able to study effectively, understand their professors, write a reflection, reaction, and term papers with confidence, do well in the exam and achieve the grades they want.

Table 2. Educational Performance

General Weighted Average (GWA) Range	Frequency	Percentage	Description
97 – 100/ 1.00 – 1.24	1	0.71%	Excellent
94 – 96/ 1.51 – 1.25	12	8.57%	Very Good
91 – 93/ 1.76 – 1.50	57	40.71%	Very Good
88 – 90/ 2.01 – 1.75	48	34.29%	Good
85 – 87/ 2.26 – 2.00	22	15.71%	Good

4.3 Relationship between Motivational Factors and Educational Performance of the Respondents

To determine whether there is a relationship between the motivational factors and the educational performance of the respondents, a correlation using Pearson r was computed.

Table 3. Relationship between Motivational Factors and Educational Performance of the Respondents

Motivational Factors	Educational Performance
	r
	0.774*

Results showed that motivational factors were significantly correlated to the educational performance of the respondents in terms of their GWA. This implies that a student who is really motivated to finish his/her master's degree pushes him/her to obtain high grades in school. Thus, this will qualify him/her for different positions that he/she is aiming for. As such, motivated people are stimulated to successfully achieve a goal or a degree of qualification in their professions (Mohamadi, 2006).

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion was drawn: The student's motivational factors during the pandemic were described as much influence while most of the respondents obtained their educational performance in their master's degree as very good. Motivational factors were significantly correlated to the educational performance of the respondents based on their GWA.

On the basis of the foregoing, the following recommendations were derived: Students should be motivated to pursue graduate education, especially in the dimension of social stimulation that comprises that behavior that affords stimulation to others and consists of the characteristic responses which one makes to such stimulation. Graduate school professors should also understand and be able to assess the degree of motivation of their students in their every week classes, in which they will be able to contribute affirmations, inspiration, and drive to their students. Moreover, it is also recommended that students be inspired to excel and obtain excellent grades in their graduate education. Further studies should be conducted with more variables to consider and wider scope of the population to obtain a more significant result.

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