Chapter 21
A Shift in Doctoral Students' Demands and Motives During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted human life globally, including at all levels of education. In this chapter, I will discuss how I, as a doctoral student, dealt with the new educational practices which resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. I highlight the change of demand and motives I experienced, including the conditions and challenges I faced when managing my son's home learning and my online learning. I developed a new educational practice of using technology to support my various needs as a doctoral student. I show that commitment, dedication, and resilience during the restricted learning process played an important role in helping me to successfully adjust to my pandemic learning conditions. I conclude this chapter by providing practical insights into how other doctoral students could adapt to the changes resulting from COVID-19. These insights can help future doctoral students cope with stress associated with significant change, workload demands, time-management challenges, and personal commitments.

Keywords Doctoral students · Education · Motive · Demand · Wellbeing · COVID-19

21.1 Introduction

It has been previously acknowledged that a Ph.D. is a challenging journey (Lee & Murray, 2015; Pretorius et al., 2019; Woodhouse & Wood, 2022). However, it is also an important stage for future academics where they develop their identities, agency, and intercultural competence (Pretorius et al., 2019). Through the process of supervision, mentoring, and training, it is assumed that doctoral students will develop the necessary skills to deal with a variety of challenges including academic pressures and personal struggles. However, these issues are often multi-faceted, and doctoral education programmes often do not adequately address the needs of students (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021; Pretorius et al., 2019).

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Drawing upon the concept of dialectical relation between demand and motive, this chapter argues that the COVID-19 pandemic created conditions that generated new demands and raised new motives for doctoral students, in particular in relation to the use of technology to facilitate learning. I explore my experiences through the use of autoethnography as a methodology. By reflecting on my experiences, I show how I was forced to embrace new technological learning modes and develop my digital skills.

21.2   Demand and Motive as a Theoretical Framework

This chapter employs the concept of *demand* and *motive* from cultural-historical theory as the central dynamic factors of development (Chaiklin, 2012; Hedegaard, 2002). In this context, *demand* refers to the requirements of the social situation. As noted in the previous chapter, demands include competencies and values and create conditions for development (see Yu, 2022). Motives created in social activities define human development (Leont'ev, 1978). *Motive* describes "the goals that come to characterise a person's actions in different settings over a long period of time" (Hedegaard, 2002, p. 55).

Motive affects a person's participation in an activity (Fleer, 2012; Kravtsova & Kravtsov, 2012). This concept indicates the connection a person has with their surroundings. Therefore, the concept of motive can be used to explore the interaction of doctoral students with the learning environment, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Motive is not located solely in a person, nor solely in a situation or condition external to a person" (Chaiklin, 2012, p. 209), rather a dialectical relationship exists between a person and their surroundings (Fleer, 2012; Hedegaard, 2002, 2012). Moreover, "motives are developed in the course of the person's interaction in social institutional practices" (Winther-Lindqvist, 2012, p. 129). This highlights that institutional practice plays a crucial role in supporting a person's development where the institutional practices related to the doctoral degree programme provide social interaction through the conditions created. Thus, employing the concept of motive allows us to understand how such institutional practices influence students' participation during their doctoral studies.

There are three different kinds of motives, namely dominant motives, meaningful or meaning-making motives, and stimulating motives (Hedegaard, 2002, 2012).

> "Dominant motives are the most important, linked to the activities that are central and meaningful to a person's life. A dominant motive is always meaningful; otherwise, it cannot be the dominant motive. A stimulating motive is one that could be meaningful in another context, but placed into a new activity, it can possibly motivate new activity in such a way that old and new activities become combined" (Stenild & Iversen, 2011, p. 138).

Dominant motives connect to the type of activities that are central to a person's life. For me, this ties in with the role of being a mother. It is not only due to the role of a single parent during my doctoral study, but also related to the feminist

theory (Leavy & Harris, 2018) which positions females as mothers that are simply expected to do it all unsupported. Working, studying, taking care of my son, and providing home-schooling appear to be overly demanding and potentially harm my physical and mental health. As a result, my dominant motive becomes a meaningful or meaning-making motive because something that dominates a person's life should be meaningful (Hedegaard, 2002, 2012).

> Such shifts in motives occur in the multiple roles as a mother and a student that dominate my life give meaning to living my life. However, since my decision to pursue a doctoral degree few years ago, a new motive has emerged and the motivation caused by the pandemic itself stimulated new activities, switching my schedule between working on my research and supporting my son's home learning, as well as creating workstation at home, eventually leading the new strategy to achieve my goals.

It is through the relation between people and their surroundings where the old and new activities are combined in order to develop a stimulating motive (Hedegaard, 2002, 2012).

By using Vygotsky's (1994, 1997) theory of demand and motive, a dialectical relation between a person and the surroundings can be explored (Hedegaard, 2012). Figure 21.1 presents a dialectical relationship between demand and motive of a doctoral student, academically and personally reflected through the connection between an individual and the surrounding environment. The connection between a person with their surroundings is reflected through the concept of a dialectical relation between the concepts of demand and motive, representing how the cultural response in regard to a change of environment in the learning context and the everyday life context is created (Fig. 21.1). Hedegaard's (2014) conception of motives and demands as dialectic across activity settings is used to understand my development of the new practices related to online learning at home as a new activity setting in the institutional practices.

21.3 New Educational Practices During the Pandemic

Recently, educational practices have changed as a result of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation (see Cahusac de Caux, 2022). Universities around the world have been trying to support students' academic needs and also ensure the safety of students at the same time. This had a significant impact on doctoral students' academic lives (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Such difficulties were also compounded for doctoral students who simultaneously fulfil the role of mother and Ph.D. student in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several chapters in this book have highlighted some of these struggles (see, for example, Adams et al., 2022; Patel, 2022; Yip & Maestre, 2022).

> I was approaching my final milestone when COVID-19 suddenly hit us. Fear was the first feeling that came to me. Afraid of the unknown deadly virus that has spread around the world. In that condition, a thought about how to manage my study in this kind of situation
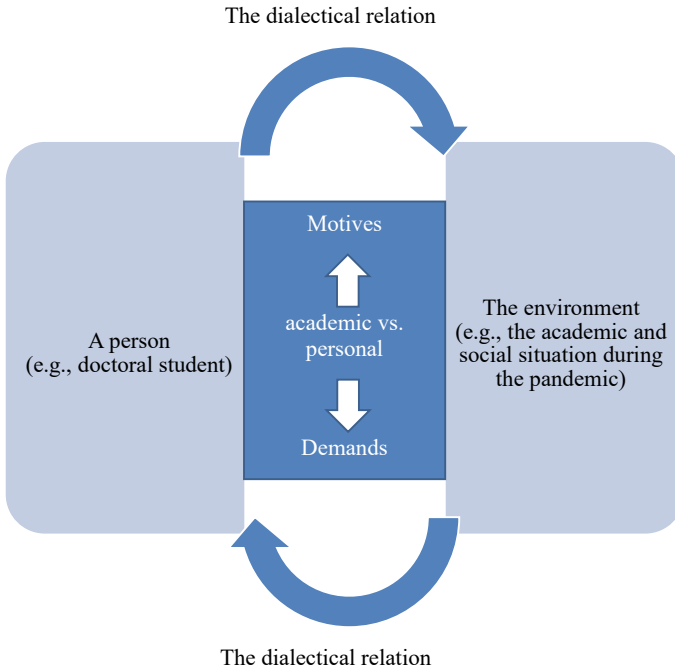
The dialectical relation

Motives

academic vs.
personal

A person
(e.g., doctoral student)

The environment
(e.g., the academic and
social situation during
the pandemic)

Demands

The dialectical relation

Fig. 21.1 A dialectical relation between demand and motive of a doctoral student

> haunted me. Not only thinking about how to adapt to home learning and online learning practices, but also thinking about how I can study while having my son doing the home learning as well. These situations result in new goal setting to juggle the multiple roles.

The appearance of new institutional policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a new educational practice: online learning. While distance learning is understood as a learning strategy for students who are geographically distant, online learning is defined as a type of learning strategy that involves the use of technology to support the learning experiences (Carliner, 2004; Moore et al., 2011). Online learning can be seen as a version of distance learning due to the use of technology in this type of learning strategy for students that are physically distant (Conrad, 2002; Reeves et al., 2002). It has been previously noted that the influence of different factors should also be considered in developing and using technology for educational purposes, namely social, cultural, economic, and political factors (Selwyn, 2011). However, during the pandemic, the implementation of technology was key to maintaining the continuity of the educational process, and there was little time to consider these different factors which influence students' learning.

This adaptation to online-only learning was found to be difficult and stressful (Novikov, 2020). The difficulties of online learning included a lack of resources, including a poor internet connection, as well as unsuitable home study environments

(Novikov, 2020). This was particularly true in my case, where I lost access to the specially-designed doctoral research space.

> I still remember when the university informed all the doctoral students to empty their working spaces in the Faculty of Education building for safety reasons. I tried to work at home using my laptop. However, using the laptop was not enough. The need for multiple monitors and an available printer emerged. So, I decided to buy these and build my own working station. Providing the working facilities was a considerable expense. It did not end there. Having all the facilities was still not enough without a proper learning environment. I shared my learning space with my son who had to study from home as well, leading to distractions when he needed help.

21.4   New Motives Emerged in Educational Conditions During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A new institutional practice creates new demands that position a person in a new orientation as a result of facing the challenges to a role (Capp, 2013; Hedegaard, 2012).

> My new learning environment imposed on me by COVID-19 elicited new demands—what could be done to motivate me to meet my learning demands? New motives emerged that determined how I dealt with the competing demands created by the pandemic situation, such as the safety demand for me and my family, my personal life demand, my familial demand, and my academic demand.

The tension created in a social situation as a result of demands from the environment and my motives acted as a catalyst for new psychological development (Vygotsky, 1998). For me, tensions emerged in the activity settings when dealing with the new demands, enabling an opportunity for human development (Hedegaard, 2014). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic was actually a catalyst to transform my educational practices.

The difficulties that I experienced in doing online learning created motivating conditions for me to develop my digital skills. For doctoral students, the use of computers and the internet was already a part of daily activities. However, implementing online-only learning and during the pandemic created new conditions with which I was unfamiliar.

> It was all about resilience due to the need to adjust to the new learning environment and the demands on playing double roles as a Ph.D. student and a mom. I struggled at the beginning, physically and mentally. I had so many things to do related to my tasks as a student and my responsibilities as a mother which was added to by handling my son's home learning. It was a drastic life change that needed to be accommodated immediately. It causes an anxiety that can result in failures. The Ph.D. and the mother's role had been so hard in normal life and even harder during the pandemic. I had to adjust and find alternate ways to organise everything and meet the demands.

During this pandemic, parents and teachers shared responsibilities in developing children's learning at home using online learning (Pramling Samuelsson et al., 2020).

Besides supervising their children at home, parents also need to work alongside the teachers organising and managing the implementation of children's daily activities (Pramling Samuelsson et al., 2020). This required a strong commitment, as well as a significant amount of time and energy to help children learn at home. On the other side, doctoral students as parents were also required to maintain their research productivity, completing research-related tasks, as well as organising the supervision and research discussion.

> The requirement for parents to work from home while providing assistance for their children's learning has consumed my energy and time. Aside from my resilience, a collective effort and understanding from me, my supervisors, and the university played a crucial role. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my research project has become a major concern, including safety and wellbeing issues due to the personal pressures I encountered and continue to face due to the crisis. In these unprecedented circumstances, personal commitments and academic commitments must be juggled in managing research from home.

21.5   Dialectical Relation Between Demand and Motive

The pandemic situation created conflicting demands in my doctoral journey, which represents the idea of a dialectic relationship between a person and their surroundings (Vygotsky, 1994, 1997). How I adapted to the changes in order to cope with associated stress, workload, time constraints, and personal life concerns during the pandemic demonstrates the significant relationship between an individual and their environment. As I reflect on my journey, I realise,

> How commitment, dedication, and resilience were developed from the limited learning opportunities played an important role for me to successfully adjust to my new learning and everyday life conditions by managing the competing demands during the pandemic.

There is a "holistic dialectical relations between psychological, biological and cultural dimensions" (Fleer & Ridgway, 2014, p. 17). This understanding can provide guidance on how the learning environment can support doctoral students in a different context of learning because there is a dialectic relationship between the student as an individual and their surrounding environment. This helps in understanding how the pandemic conditions influenced my physical conditions by creating new demands and resulting in new motives emerging through the transition process, which involves dramatic tensions that needed to be resolved.

> Home learning through an online system has become the only possible strategy due to the safety reasons associated with the pandemic. However, different factors and conditions from the microsystem related to the personal condition of the student and the macrosystem related to the educational practices determine the success of the new practice, including in doctoral degree practices. Collaboration work between the environment, such as institutional practices as part of the macrosystem in educational practices and the individual condition of the student as part of the microsystem in educational practices, contributes to the successful journey of a doctoral student.
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> The pandemic attacked everyone. It has been a collective struggle. It has been a huge transformation in everything in our everyday life practices. Undertaking everything from

home as a part of an isolation strategy to stop the spreading of the virus was a major challenge for everyone. However, related to my doctoral journey, all the support from others, friends, neighbours, supervisors, the university, and even the government created a motivation in me to fight the struggles. I could see that Monash University was aware of the challenges caused by COVID-19 and showed efforts to ensure that the financial security and the health and wellbeing of students were well supported. Hardship funding was donated to help those who had financial problems, health support was provided for physical and mental health, and academic support was available related to access to the facilities and the system, for example by applying for an extension. I could also apply for an extension with scholarship support for the tuition fee and some other expenses. The library service was improved by expanding the access to eBook collections adding digital versions of in print books. It was really helpful due to the challenging situations.

21.6 Alternative Strategies Addressing the Doctoral Journey Demands During the Pandemic

I would also like to discuss and share some alternative strategies that can address the doctoral journey demands required by the new educational policy of the COVID-19 and help Ph.D. students cope with the struggles during the pandemic.

> COVID-19 has created many challenges for people, including doctoral students in doing their research project. Moreover, the challenges were worse for Ph.D. moms that have double or multiple roles. For example, they have had to try to manage their children's needs, home schooling and their own Ph.D. journey. Fortunately, the institution has recognised this and supported the Ph.D. students' needs, including Ph.D. moms. Being strict and flexible at the same time are important. How can we discipline ourselves in meeting the demands and provide flexibility by understanding self needs and self-care? I was preparing a thesis with published works and somehow the process of publication has been impacted by the pandemic as well. There was nothing we could do about this. Thus, I extended my candidature. The additional time meant that we had more time for the unpredictable situations to be solved with the help from the supervision team.

Firstly, facing the pandemic situation, doctoral students need to make a plan to help them manage the situation. It has been shown that pathway thinking from hope theory (McNeill, 2010; Snyder, 2000) assisted the doctoral student in achieving their hope by developing a strategy and creating a plan (Utami, 2019). Therefore, doctoral students will be better able to manage the competing demands from surroundings, such as academic demands and personal commitment.

Importantly, agency thinking, as the other component of the theory, plays a crucial role in determining the success of the plan created (McNeill, 2010; Snyder, 2000). Agency thinking is the key component of hope theory related to self-control and relationship with surroundings (McNeill, 2010; Snyder, 2000). Therefore, secondly, doctoral students need to develop intrapersonal skills related to wellbeing and self-control and interpersonal skills related to their relationship with their surroundings. Lau and Pretorius (2019) highlight the mental health crisis in academia. Consequently, being self-aware and getting support during the doctoral journey are crucially important (Lau & Pretorius, 2019). By recognizing the dialectical relationship between a person and the social environment, a collaboration effort can be

developed between a doctoral student as an individual and the university support system as part of the social environment in order to support the doctoral students' wellbeing during their journey.

Moreover, in practice, online learning requires different information, communication, and technology skills in order to be able to use the different apps needed for learning and manage the needs of the doctoral practices in the digital environment. Although, technology-based learning or the digital learning conditions can cause the doctoral students to feel overwhelmed, it has become the only possible strategy of learning for community safety reasons during the pandemic. Therefore, thirdly, it is crucial for doctoral students to develop their information, communication, and technology skills to fulfil the needs of digital or online learning. This is further discussed in other chapters of this book (see, for example, Chaps. 32 and 33, Aiusheeva, 2022; Kisworo et al., 2022).

Finally, regarding technology-based learning, due to the implementation of home learning using digital platforms, the learning process relies on the availability of information technology devices, including a stable internet connection. In contrast to the university, the lack of technological infrastructure, facilities, and supplies such as computers, internet connections, and other technological devices was found as the main obstacle I experienced in the home learning setting, and this caused disruption during the learning and research process. Therefore, a doctoral student needs to seek support in order to support their learning needs, specifically in the form of digital learning.

21.7 Conclusion

While the COVID-19 disruption persists, Ph.D. researchers are facing a crisis period which could not have been predicted. The changes in educational practices during the pandemic have been very challenging. However, seizing the opportunity presented by these new conditions can be seen as a transformation for innovation in educational practices and an opportunity for individual change. Specifically, in a doctoral programme, short-term social adaptations due to COVID-19 have forced Ph.D. students to play their roles and take responsibilities to maintain and finish the research journey from home. By highlighting the challenges and insights based on my personal experience, this chapter tries to contribute to the analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on doctoral students' lives through the investigation of motives and the demands which emerged. This chapter discussed the educational response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how I adapted to the changing learning environment given my personal situation. I found that perseverance in this challenging situation was important and believe it can help doctoral students keep a spirit of positivity to continually strive for higher standards of learning.

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