A Review of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly struck the world in 2020 and had long-lasting effects. Many people had lost their jobs, the economy faltered, and people were stuck at home with no way of seeing friends or non-immediate family. The pandemic also had a profound impact on students. Schools were forced to transition into online learning, which was something that many school districts and universities were not prepared for (Russell, Head, Wolfe-Enslow, Holland, & Zimmerman, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on people's needs. According to Abraham Maslow (1943), people’s needs are arranged into a hierarchy where basic level needs must be met before higher level needs can be. This includes meeting basic needs like food, water, shelter, and physical health before meeting needs that allow us to feel self-esteem or become creative (Maslow, 1943). This paper examines the scarce amount of literature that discusses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, student needs and outcomes, and the COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on these aforementioned concepts.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

When Maslow published *A Theory of Human Motivation* in 1943, he had already previously confirmed a few things about motivation. First off, motivation was in some part due to physiological needs. However, a motivational theory could not revolve simply around these needs. Maslow (1943) stated, “Any drive that is somatically based and localizable was shown to be atypical rather than typical in human motivation” (pg. 370). Maslow also placed importance on a motivation theory that would focus on end goals, goals that could be achieved through conscious motivation. Yet, Maslow believed that unconscious goals were still part of motivation and played much more of a factor than differing cultural goals. Acts were said to have more than one motivation. Motivation was just one aspect of behavior. Behavior is caused by motivation,
but behavior is biologically, situationally, and culturally determined as well (Maslow, 1943). Finally, most salient to the modern understanding of Maslow’s theory is that human needs were part of a hierarchy. Some needs had to be satisfied before achieving other needs, and these should not be treated as completely separate from one another. (Maslow, 1943).

In *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Maslow states that physiological needs must precede other needs like safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow specifically emphasizes food and water in this regard. If someone was completely starved, every motivation and desire would revolve around satisfying the hunger need. Maslow then discusses safety needs as being the next level of needs to be met after physiological ones. He also says that many people in society feel like safety needs are generally met (this is Maslow’s view, but may not reflect actuality). Yet, he uses infants as an example of the importance of safety needs. Infants show great distress at even the most minor of inconveniences: bright lights, fast movements, loud noises, etc. Furthermore, infants and children react more negatively and are generally more vulnerable to illnesses. Maslow posits that children prefer a predictable environment and are more likely to stick with parents who are abusive because they are viewed as the only means of protection against the world. Maslow believes adults also prefer stability, but as previously mentioned, he theorizes that most adults have their safety needs met (Maslow, 1943).

If physiological and safety needs are met, then love needs will emerge. The person will long for affectionate relationships with other people. This includes friendships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships. Something interesting that Maslow points out is that sex may be seen as a physiological need. However, sexual behavior is largely based on the feeling of love and belonging needs being achieved. Love needs includes both the person receiving love and giving love as well (Maslow, 1943). After love needs, Maslow places the level of esteem
needs. People desire a high evaluation of themselves, high self-esteem, and esteem of others. They desire independence, freedom, achievement, prestige, and reputation. If esteem needs are met, then people are much more likely to be satisfied with their place in the world (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, adapted from Shewell 2020.

At the peak of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs lies self-actualization. The need for self-actualization may develop, because we often still feel unfulfilled even if all of the previous needs are met. In Maslow’s (1943) words, self-actualization is “This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (pg. 382). This broad definition can mean many different things for many different people. It is focused on the individual’s fulfillment, which is likely distinct from how another would feel fulfillment (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow himself acknowledged that his theory was not set in stone. Many modifications have been and continue to be made to the hierarchy of needs theory. Even decades later, Maslow pointed to the idea of self-transcendence as a possible next need beyond self-actualization. Self-transcendence meant a type of peak experience for Maslow. These were experiences where
the sense of the actualizing-self and personal concerns were actually lost in the moment. Once a person has reached self-actualization, they may go on to reach self-transcendence. Self-transcendent individuals seek something greater than themselves. This could be service for others, service to some higher power, etc. Essentially, the biggest modification to Maslow's theory was that motivation now went beyond the satisfaction of one’s own personal needs. Humans would now look to satisfy the needs of something or someone beyond themself (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Education**

Maslow made some general conclusions about how education could be used to reach self-actualization in 1965. He parallels self-actualization with intrinsic learning. Intrinsic learning means finding the processes that aid in helping people to become all that they can be. This is as opposed to extrinsic learning, which Maslow defines as adding new skills and crafts to our repertoire. Maslow stated that the self-actualizing person will learn the process of intrinsic learning. They listen to themselves, have a sense of responsibility, are honest, and work hard. They are involved in causes outside themselves yet are fully absorbed in their learning experiences. Maslow notes that intrinsic learning is naturally easier for adults, since they already have adequate learning capacities and are more likely to have found their direction in life (Maslow, 1965).

Several studies have looked into students' hierarchy of needs. Strong and Fiebert (1987) researched college students, and found that they ranked higher level needs as the most important ones. Another study found that negative emotions were less frequent in college students who were better satisfied in each level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Lester, Hvezda, Sullivan, & Plourde, 1983). A follow-up study by Lester (2013) confirmed that students ranked higher level
needs as the most important ones, except for finding that belonging needs were rated as less important than safety needs. Lester (2013) had also found inconsistencies in the proposed methods of the Strong and Fiebert (1987) and Lester et al. (1983) studies in the way that they measured the meeting of needs with scores of depression and mania. This showed that it’s important to understand it is not simple to measure needs levels in hierarchy of needs on an objective level (Lester, 2013).

Maslow’s theory would suggest that students who do not have their physiological and basic needs met would struggle with becoming engrossed in school, and therefore, less likely to succeed academically. Students who don’t have belonging or esteem needs met will struggle to reach out for help regarding school assignments. They will also lack creativity, which is something Maslow associated with self-transcendence needs. Students don’t always act in line with their hierarchy of needs. For example, they may prioritize cramming a study session the night before a test over sleep. However, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs contributes to the idea that students’ lower-level needs may need to be met until they achieve higher levels of needs that are more congruent with success in the classroom (Brophy, 2004).

Peer relationships have been shown to affect student outcomes (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008). More specifically, enhancing early adolescents' peer relationships may promote higher academic achievement. These peer relationships are associated with higher classroom engagement, grades, self-esteem, prosocial behavior, and lower levels of negative behaviors. Rejection by peers is linked with less engagement, a higher likelihood to drop out, more behavioral problems, and an increased likelihood of depression. While this is generally true, not all peer relationships will enhance achievement levels. In fact, some may obstruct students’ achievement (Roseth et al., 2008).
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs during COVID

Li, Xue, Xu, Wang, and Zhang (2021) examined the effect of people trying to satisfy their needs on the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in China. Starting with physiological needs, COVID-19 had been transmitted by failure to protect oneself when dining or going to restaurants, which some people had to do so they could meet their physiological need for food. The first cases in the Liwan District of Guangzhou City came from a man going to a restaurant, then the disease spread to other restaurant attendees and his own family. This showed that restrictions for dining services needed to be put into place. It was paramount to monitor the health status of restaurant employees as well. Food delivery got more common in the pandemic era, but it was essential for non-contact exchange or masks to be worn during the process. Something that helped restaurants stop the transmission of COVID was restricting the number of customers in an area and increasing table spacing (Li et al., 2021).

Safety needs caused people to go to hospitals during the pandemic, however many hospitals became hotspots for COVID. Inadequate prevention measures in hospitals spread COVID to employees, families, and friends. Specifically at the start of the pandemic, asymptomatic patients were transported to and within hospitals in Harbin City, China. The Chinese government had solved problems like this by requiring COVID testing of patients and hospital staff, online patient registration, and tracing the source of outbreaks (Li et al., 2021).

Social distancing had an impact on belonging needs. Social distancing was a measure used to decrease the transmission of COVID-19. Physical distancing and restriction on gatherings can cause anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Many people favored these gatherings over the potential of getting or giving COVID. China had reported an increased number of COVID-19 cases after the New Year Holiday (Li et al., 2021). People had gathered for leisure
activities and life events like weddings and funerals. China had implemented restrictions on gatherings, screening before entering environments with many people, encouraged mask wearing, and tested large numbers of people to curb the pandemic (Li et al., 2021).

Li et al. (2021) says that people could meet esteem needs during the pandemic by wearing a mask and taking other responsible precautions to ensure the healthiness of others during the pandemic. A man in Beijing had helped save the lives of others by immediately reporting to the doctor and tracing all the places he had been and people he had met. COVID transmission could be lessened by self-disciplined individuals who followed protocols. Lastly, self-actualization needs were hard to meet during the pandemic. However, they could be met more easily if people met all the previous needs. The most essential one being keeping oneself healthy and taking the initiative to keep others healthy (Li et al., 2021).

Similar effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic were felt in the United States as well. Ryan, Coppola, Canyon, Brickhouse, and Swienton (2020) published an article that shared how the COVID-19 pandemic shook the world and had a profound impact on people’s needs. It affected people on the most basic levels of physiological and safety needs, as well as belonging needs. The pandemic presented great financial difficulty for many people, and the isolation of pandemic times also caused psychological stress to many. Since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts the basic safety needs of many, it would be difficult for many people to reach the next levels of needs in Maslow’s hierarchy (Ryan et al., 2020). The pandemic affected the physiological needs of people by causing them to have less mobility, less food access, and possible loss of shelter as well. Safety needs were compromised by unemployment, worry over an uncertain future, and an overall lessened feeling of security. Less access to family and friends cost people the ability to fulfill their social needs, and again, a worry over an uncertain future made many question their
self-worth and not fulfill their esteem needs. Ryan et al. (2020) argued that failure to understand Maslow’s hierarchy of needs by policy makers would lead to long-term societal harm and social instability.

Older people and people with underlying conditions faced the most threat from COVID-19 (Ryan et al., 2020). This is a threat to their safety needs, whereas the younger and healthier population faced the other effects of the pandemic (employment stability & social isolation). Ryan et al. (2020) stated that many peoples’ hierarchy of needs would face a tipping point, “This tipping point will be when they see their current needs as unmet and their opportunity for future growth and potential disappear” (pg. 625). Gradual lifting of restrictions was deemed the best method to allow society to return to normal functioning and meeting needs (Ryan et al., 2020). What is essential to meeting people’s needs in society during a time like the COVID pandemic was risk management. It was important to strike a balance between keeping people safe from the pandemic, yet allowing society to return to normal so financial and social needs could be met (Ryan et al., 2020). What was interesting is that states and local governments in the United States also had a lot of power in choosing to impose/not impose certain COVID-19 protection measures. The U.S. faced a heavy debate around restrictions because some had worried more about their basic safety needs like health, while others were more concerned about the safety needs of employment, or the love/belonging needs of seeing friends and family.

Monitoring the current risk of transmission and destructiveness of the disease at the time determined when it was best to ease and tighten restrictions. This helped to strike a balance between trying to meet health needs and employment and social needs (Ryan et al., 2020).

The health issues that result from COVID-19 were an obvious threat to people’s physiological needs. People feel an increased threat to their physiological needs during times of
disease, war, or natural disasters. This is why even countries that didn't suffer from scarcity of food saw many people clearing out grocery stores in a frenzy. People would feel like it was more important to go to crowded places to get food instead of avoiding other people who could possibly spread COVID to them, showing how physiological needs felt more important than security needs (Bozyiğit, 2021). If physiological needs were satisfied, many people did then begin to worry about their safety needs. The unpredictability of the pandemic caused people to worry about their employment and access to resources in a struggling economy. Masks, sanitizers, and social distancing became common measures because people worried about their security and health. Belonging needs could be satisfied easier if people had family in the same household. A substitute for those who didn’t was more frequent social connection with their friends and family online. Esteem needs were hard to meet, since many people had to worry about physiological, security, and belonging needs first. The reality of having employment at all contributed to feeling esteem, because so many others had lost their jobs or struggled to make a living. Some companies and businesses took some of the brunt away from lower-earning employees or customers, which increased their esteem needs. Healthcare professionals became more valued during the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Maslow had already recognized that most people would not reach the process of self-actualization in their life. When a crisis like the pandemic strikes, this makes self-actualization even harder to reach. Although, in some cases, the crisis made people begin to look beyond themself and care more about others (Bozyiğit, 2021).

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Online Education before COVID**

Although COVID impacted Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and hierarchy of needs impacts students in the classroom, online learning was not a direct result of the pandemic. Milheim
(2012) examined the hierarchy of needs in online learning before the pandemic. Some common deficiencies in online learning programs that the study points to for students is lack of social interaction with peers, course content being unsuitable for online delivery, absence of a collaborative and supportive classroom environment, poor distribution of the knowledge in a course, technology access and other difficulties, and lower student motivation. Milheim (2012) compares the levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs to needs that are successful for online learning, to address the aforementioned difficulties associated with online learning.

Milheim (2012) includes a computer, internet access, software, and books as the basic needs for online learning. These are all needs that need to be met before students can reach the next level of needs. The next level of safety needs of children in an online classroom may be hard to reach due to student's anxiety and unfamiliarity of an online classroom compared to an in-person one. It is recommended that the teacher allows a short adjustment period during the start of an online class that will alleviate some stress for students. Consistent course formatting and easy-to-use interfaces can help meet student needs at the online safety level. Unfamiliarity with grading in the online classroom can be a cause for concern, which means rubrics and clear expectations should be implemented by teachers.

Belonging needs should be met by an online classroom that encourages as much peer and instructor interaction as possible. This can be done through discussion posts, small group activities, and dialogue with teachers and students. Lack of face-to-face communication can be a challenge to creating a meaningful teacher-student relationship. Milheim (2012) suggests one solution to this is creating initial assignments where students talk about themselves, and the teacher will provide a response. Responses from teachers should feel personal and be posted promptly after the student’s initial assignment. Peer interaction may also face challenges, so it is
important for teachers to create ways for students to participate in the online classroom (Milheim, 2012). Melheim notes that peer-to-peer interaction should become more prevalent as technologies will increase in coming years that are more conducive in fostering a collaborative environment.

Esteem needs can be harder to meet in an online learning environment that has less collaboration and a lower sense of a strong community. Since students could be less aware of their role in an online learning program, they could lack the ability to fulfill their esteem needs (Milheim, 2012). Written feedback can leave room for misinterpretation, which is why positive verbal communication is paramount to building students’ esteem. Course preparation, positive reinforcement, and responsive feedback are all aspects that can build esteem as well. Online classroom flexibility and facilitative teaching will increase students' self-worth. The role of the teacher in an online classroom is to assist learners in managing their own learning in order to achieve peak level of self-actualization. This considers Maslow’s belief of the need for intrinsic learning. Teachers should target students' needs individually. They should encourage learning that is self-directed. Tools and resources can be given to students so that the learning process can be individualized and personalized (Milheim, 2012).

Changes in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs During the COVID Pandemic: Thesis

More research about online learning was a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as most schools were forced to shift their curriculum to online formats. There are some similar challenges associated with pre-COVID online learning and online learning during COVID times. However, the COVID pandemic presented some unique challenges itself. Specifically, challenges to meeting students’ hierarchy of needs, which is the focus of this research paper.
Previous research has led to some general hypotheses about what would be found in literature that examined the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on students’ hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943; Brophy, 2004; Roseth et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Bozyiğit, 2021; Milheim, 2012). For starters, basic needs (physiological and safety needs) will still be at the forefront. These needs will have to be met before students can reach higher levels of needs. Basic needs are going to be negatively impacted by the pandemic. The second expected finding is that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect students who feel safer in school/university than their home environment and students who don’t have access to resources to learn remotely. Not every student feels safer at home than they do at school, so the pandemic will negatively affect these students. The switch to a more online form of learning will also hinder students’ education for those who are not familiar with or don’t have access to computers/internet. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic will have the greatest impact on the love/belonging needs of students. The effects of social isolation and lack of peer and student interaction will be the most common issues reported among students. Lastly, there will be less mention about meeting self-actualization needs. Since Maslow states that a majority of people do not reach self-actualization, this will be a need that is of less concern during a time like the COVID-19 pandemic where other needs levels take precedence.

**Changes in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs During the COVID Pandemic: Results**

Shewell (2020) constructed a hierarchy of needs during online learning based upon Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Some similarities and differences to Milheim’s (2012) hierarchy of needs for online learning can be seen as well. Shewell places computers, internet connection, and hardware on the level that compares to physiological needs (similar to Mileheim). Shewell labels these as equipment needs. Although the U.S. is a first-world country, there are still a numerous
amount of students who don’t have access to computers or good enough internet to complete their work in a timely fashion. Next in Shewell’s (2020) pyramid comes environment needs. The student must feel safe in their environment, but other aspects of environment needs are a place where it is quiet with a lack of distractions, and where the student can feel calm. Not every student shares the typical same place of learning in the classroom anymore, and some students’ homes lack these environment needs (Shewell, 2020).

Shewell (2020) places community/interaction needs as the belonging needs of his hierarchy. This means the same to Shewell as it meant to Milheim (2012); student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction and sense of community. Interaction happens more naturally during in-person school. A sense of community for online learning really must be worked at and built. Live learning and Zoom meetings can be much more effective in meeting interaction needs than asynchronous courses. Teachers can assign group activities for synchronous learning, and text-based discussion forums can be a useful substitute for asynchronous courses. However, it is recommended to create topics and group students with similar interests in order to foster a meaningful connection (Shewell, 2020).

Self-reliance needs take the place of esteem needs in Shewell’s (2020) hierarchy. On the surface, it may seem like there is less alignment between self-reliance and esteem needs. On the other hand, Shewell recognizes that it takes a specific type of learner to be successful in the online classroom. Self-starters make the most successful online learners (Shewell, 2020). They solve problems mostly on their own and use support networks when they need to. Teachers should help students track their learning progress. They should hold students accountable as well. Teachers should involve parents more often if they are teaching younger children to ensure
that the child can navigate problems beyond their grasp. Overall, self-reliance needs require autonomous learning, problem-solving abilities, and local support (Shewell, 2020).

Self-actualizing needs for Shewell (2020) are labeled as creative needs. Students will connect with what they are learning if they are working on projects that are intrinsically motivating. This will culminate into creativity. Students who reach the creative level reflect, process, synthesize, and evaluate information. Similar to Maslow's idea that the self-actualizing person looks for a purpose greater than themselves, Shewell emphasizes the importance of connecting what students are learning to something outside of the classroom. For some, this may include bringing problems from their community into the classroom and looking for solutions. For others, it comes from simply putting in effort to pursue their passions beyond the scope of the classroom (Shewell, 2020).

Shewell’s hierarchy of needs for online learning, adapted from Shewell 2020.

Harun, Hamzah, Abidin, Wan Zamri, & Hashim (2021) states that fear of sickness from COVID, economic struggles caused or exacerbated by the pandemic, and a stressful environment at home are all issues that hinder long-term educational goals. Relating this to Maslow’s
hierarchy of needs, physiological and safety needs are taking precedence over education. Harun et al. (2021) studied the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students’ learning outcomes in a survey of Malaysian college students. Students reported that it was harder for them to complete open-ended assignments or take-home examinations because of the online course curriculum (Harun et al., 2021). However, compared to a European-based study (Fidalgo, Thormann, Kulyk, & Jose Alberto, 2020) this is a contrasting result. Students in the European study had reported more favorable attitudes to online learning during COVID, yet it’s important to note that students from this study also were much more likely to report having already taken some form of online courses before (Harun et al., 2021).

46.6% of students agreed and 30% students strongly agreed in the Malaysian study that they could handle online learning easier if they had a better device (Harun et al., 2021). These numbers were similar for students in their likelihood to agree that good internet connection would help them to succeed more in online learning. This again connects to the basic needs of online learning that need to be met so that students can meet their next level of needs and achieve academic success. For students in poorer countries or students living in rural areas, these basic online needs are harder to meet (Harun et al., 2021).

Most students in the survey agreed that they could work better in online learning if they were taking the courses in a different environment. As previously stated, there is an importance to a quiet and calm environment for taking online courses. More research should be done on this type of question, as family size in Malaysia is typically larger than in Western countries. This could lead to less quiet time while trying to participate in online learning. In regard to belonging needs, 82.7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would understand subjects easier if they had a friend around (Harun et al., 2021). Collaborative learning has already been shown to
be important in meeting belonging needs and facilitating successful online learning (Harun et al., 2021). Collaborative learning can be made easier through social media interactions with peers and learning management systems (Harun et al., 2021).

Russell, Head, Wolfe-Enslow, Holland, & Zimmerman (2022) conducted a survey that included mostly American college students. This survey measured needs satisfaction, financial well-being, and college persistence. Financial well-being can be seen as a security need and college persistence as an esteem need, and a possible self-actualization need as well. Participants in the study reported that they did not feel as good about their financial situation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Russell et al., 2022). College persistence was also a more common characteristic for those who scored better on scales of financial well-being. College persistence was found to decrease if needs for social belonging and self-actualization were not being met. These correlations were somewhat weak. However, financial well-being and needs satisfaction were found to be significant predictors of college persistence (Russell et al., 2022).

Some ways to address financial well-being in students are financial education workshop series, peer-to-peer support, financial coaching, and financial emergency assistance (Russell et al., 2022). Needs satisfaction can be fulfilled if faculty make efforts to build relationships with students. Mindful practices and visualization exercises can help to reduce student anxiety. Engaging students in nature has shown to be useful in reducing anxiety during times of crisis (Russell et al., 2022). Social isolation makes belonging needs harder to meet. Yet, meeting belonging needs plays an important role in reaching college persistence (Russell et al., 2022). University educators should work to build empathy for students who share both similarities and differences with them. It’s important that staff become listeners instead of always giving advice, and virtual office hours provide a good opportunity to still meet students one-on-one. One
interesting finding from this study was that esteem needs were not as important to students
during times of crisis like the COVID pandemic (Russell et al., 2022). More research should be
done on this, but this is likely since a majority of students could not fulfill physiological, safety,
and belonging needs during the pandemic.

Manze, Larsen, Keegan, Freudenburg, & Jones (2021) interviewed college students in
New York City who had mostly lived in the 33 neighborhoods of the city that COVID-19 most
adversely affected. The study concluded that better financial support and social support were
both factors that were linked with college success and persistence (Manze et al., 2021). If
students had their basic needs met, then the next important need to them was having a facilitative
online learning system and supportive university educators. Students who failed to meet basic
needs or these next important needs had suffered the greatest in their academic careers. Anxiety
and depression were common in students from this study, yet they were reported for different
reasons. Some of the reasons were the fear of the COVID-19 infection itself, financial burdens
from the pandemic, or isolation from a support system (Manze et al., 2021). This shows that
anxiety and depression were linked with not meeting safety and belonging needs. These were not
predictors that students would drop out of school, but it likely affected student’s ability to thrive
academically. Students will be much more likely to stay in school if they are meeting basic and
safety needs, and will be less engaged in school if they lack financial and social support (Manze
et al., 2021).
Hierarchy of needs for academic persistence in online learning, adapted from Manze et al. 2021

The effects of economic challenges have already been discussed, and this had a negative impact on many students, especially those who were searching for work if their parents had lost their job. Yet, it’s important to note that students who lost their employment but had financial support systems around them were not as greatly impacted (Manze et al., 2021). In fact, some had more time to focus on their schoolwork. Some resources that helped students to meet their basic needs during the pandemic were student emergency funds, option to not receive credit/grade, counseling, and technology loaning from universities. Public counseling programs and unemployment benefits were a great help as well. If students couldn’t reach these resources, then they could face the challenges of dropping out, receiving lower grades, and being less engaged (Manze et al., 2021).

If students were able to meet their basic needs of having support systems, they faced the next step of having accommodating and accessible educators during the online learning process. After this, effective online pedagogy was deemed the next most important need. Instructors that were flexible with assignment deadlines, responsive to emails and questions, and willing to accommodate students' circumstances were paramount in successful online learning experiences.
for students (Manze et al., 2021). Effective online pedagogy could be achieved by accommodating and accessible staff, but also through synchronous classes, class recordings, or other resources (career counseling programs, laptop loanee programs, credit/ no credit grading options, etc.) [Manze et al., 2021].

Students during the COVID-19 pandemic often suffered from unfulfilled needs of academic and social/emotional support (Tyler, 2022). This was even more prevalent in students who were at-risk academically or lacked support in their lives. Tyler (2022) conducted a study where students received an online social and emotional mentoring program. The effects of this program on students’ feelings of connectedness and engagement were subsequently measured. Connectedness and engagement could certainly be seen as belonging needs, but could also impact esteem and self-actualization needs as well (Tyler, 2022).

The online mentoring program did not have a significant impact on increasing student engagement in the classroom. However, the program did significantly increase feelings of connectedness (Tyler, 2022). Connectedness in this study was defined as the extent to which students felt personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in their environment. The study found that students’ likelihood to be engaged was not affected by a specific program, but more so by their personalized interactions with peers and adults. Students who currently lack fulfillment in their belonging needs can reach these needs through a positive school social environment. Positive teacher-student relationships contribute to this. In turn, this leads to better performances on standardized tests and higher odds of reaching graduation (Tyler, 2022).

The online mentoring program did increase students’ feelings of connectedness (Tyler, 2022). This was characterized by perceptions about liking school, feeling they had friends, and feeling that people cared about them. Connection in the online classroom can be achieved
through smaller class sizes to create lessons that appeal to the specific interests of certain students. The online mentoring program was also great for students who would typically be considered at-risk or lacked support. The benefits of connectedness and even engagement to a higher degree were seen for these students. Many of these children lacked basic needs or belonging needs in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, making it difficult to reach the next level of needs and focus on education. What’s interesting is that Tyler (2022) notes that the pandemic affected every student in some way, so it’s important to recognize that students lacked fulfillment of needs in one area or another during these hard times. This further emphasizes that social/emotional learning can be useful for all students (Tyler, 2022).

Ansorger (2021) evaluated Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in underprivileged students both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ansorger (2021) includes the same needs at the physiological level as Maslow does, however they also include mental health and wellness at this level. This is because mental health can impact one’s ability to satisfy other basic needs. Privileged students are more likely to succeed in school, as socioeconomic status has been linked with achieving academic success. Students who are culturally and linguistically diverse are almost twice as likely to live below the poverty level than white students (Ansorger, 2021). Therefore, academic success is greatly impacted in many culturally and linguistically diverse students. This is again because the focus will remain on meeting more basic needs before worrying about academic success. Federal and state governments need to focus on addressing poverty and inequality, which is preventing students from reaching academic success. (Ansorger, 2021)
Students’ hierarchy of needs, adapted from Ansorger 2021

Ansorger (2021) defines safety needs as feeling safe and secure in the school environment. Inequitable access to higher quality schools, materials, and teachers prevents culturally and linguistically diverse students with low socioeconomic status from achieving this level of needs. Socioeconomic status largely plays into school boundaries which can often also segregate students. Richer areas will require more property taxes, which funds school districts. This is the case for poorer districts as well. This means that richer districts will have better school resources than poorer districts (Ansorger, 2021).

Love and belonging needs are affected by a school system that is often culturally unresponsive or culturally biased. Students need to be accepted and have educators that provide culturally responsive and bias-free pedagogy. U.S. schools often tend to focus on standardized practices instead of real-world practices that could potentially be much more culturally responsive (Ansorger, 2021). Teachers’ level of cultural competence can play a significant role in whether their students achieve or not. Self-esteem is developed in students who feel confident
and respected in their school lives. This can be hindered by discrimination and bias, often in the forms of microaggressions (intentional and unintentional) by others. Ansorger defines self-actualization like other theories. Self-actualization in this instance is when students fulfill their potential (Ansorger, 2021).

These inequitable policies and practices in the education system became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no standard regulations in place for online learning (Ansorger, 2021). Teachers in rural areas and high-poverty districts reported working less hours. Some districts monitored student participation and made sure school hours remained the same online as in-person, while other districts did not track either of these things. Some educators struggled with technology and most struggled in online pedagogical approaches. Schools had to be flexible yet rigorous with their instruction. There is an importance of understanding family needs, but also not letting students fall behind in school. When the pandemic started to let up, options for remote learning, in-person learning, and hybrid learning allowed students’ needs to be better met.

Problems associated with the pandemic affected all students and hit students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds particularly hard (Ansorger, 2021). During covid times, accessibility to academic resources, healthcare, mental health support, food and nutrition, and safe places was limited for many. Schools often meant access to some of these resources for students, which was not as obtainable an option when the pandemic struck. Students from rural areas or high-poverty areas lacked good internet that was needed for online learning and were about 30% less likely to have a technological device to use that was provided by the school (Ansorger, 2021). In high-poverty districts, teachers reported that they were 20% less likely to
spend time teaching new topics. Students who were culturally and linguistically diverse were 20-30% more likely to receive no instruction at all compared to white students (Ansorger, 2021).

Student engagement and motivation decreased during the pandemic while truancy decreased. Culturally and linguistically diverse students and students of low socioeconomic status had reported higher levels of truancy and less overall interactions with teachers online (Ansorger, 2021). These students are less likely to have access to a distraction-free environment conducive to online learning, technological devices, high-speed internet, and parental academic supervision. What’s important to note from Ansorger (2021) is that a return after COVID should not mean a return to the old system of learning. “Now is the time to change the systemic flaws that are widening the opportunity gap for CLD and low-SES students” [Ansorger, 2021, pg. 376 (14)]. One way to help this is by incorporating cultural experiences of students into teaching and learning. Students should be culturally competent, meaning that they are understanding and secure in their own culture while learning about other cultures as well. School curriculum should focus more on solving real-world problems, as opposed to busy work. Standardized testing should become less prevalent, and schools should push for assessment that takes into account student’s personal experiences and interactions with their environment, along with learning curriculum in school (Ansorger, 2021). It is not enough to address inequality in the school system, but inequality needs to first be addressed in meeting the physiological and safety needs of students, as expressed in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Ansorger, 2021).

Hidalgo-Camacho, Escudero, Villacis, & Varela (2021) published a study that dealt with online earning during COVID for university students in Ecuador. The study also includes students who were learning English online. They found that there was a correlation between online learning and academic achievement, and that online pedagogical practices affect the
students learning English (Hidalgo-Camacho et al., 2021). Many students also agreed that they needed to make more effort to learn online. Students worried about their basic online needs such as a good internet connection and lack of interaction. However, many students believed that they had more time for their classes, were more comfortable at home. Overall, students had a neutral perception of online learning in this study. Students learning English reported that online resources like Wikis and videos had helped them to learn more effectively. Student grades remained similar both online and in-person. There is certainly an effect of online learning in students, but whether this effect is positive or negative depends on if students’ online needs are met (Hidalgo-Camacho et al., 2021).

Conclusions

For the first hypothesis, that basic needs will take precedence over other needs, these studies showed evidence that basic needs did have to be met before other needs were. The pandemic did affect the basic needs of many students. Fear of sickness from COVID, economic struggles caused or exacerbated by the pandemic, and a stressful environment at home were some of the basic needs affected. These needs were more important for students than educational ones (Harun et al., 2021). Financial well-being was a security need that influenced students' education and likelihood to persist in college. Students generally felt worse about their financial situation during the pandemic. Financial education workshop series, peer-to-peer support, financial coaching, and financial emergency assistance could be used to combat this. (Russell et al., 2022). There were numerous college students who put educational goals on the backburner to meet financial needs for their families. Financial support was linked with college success and persistence (Manze et al., 2021). Ansorger (2021) placed mental health as a basic need that students need to have met before other needs.
The second hypothesis was that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect students who feel safer in school/university than their home environment and students who don’t have access to resources to learn remotely. Many studies mentioned their own form of basic needs that were essential for online learning. This included resources for online learning. Computers, software/hardware, and a strong internet connection were all a part of this (Shewell, 2020). Students agreed that they would succeed better in online school if they had better internet and computers, but in rural areas and poorer countries, these needs were less likely to be met (Harun et al., 2021). A similar finding existed in Ansorger (2021), that culturally and linguistically diverse students had less access to computers and high-speed internet. Students who lacked a safe and secure home environment did struggle more with online learning. Shewell (2020) believed that a calm and distraction-free environment was conducive to online learning. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a stressful environment in many homes (Harun et al., 2021). Many students also agreed that they needed to make more effort to learn online, which could be affected by whether their basic needs were met or not. However, students in this study reported that their home environment allowed them to learn better than at school, likely due to having more time to learn (Hidalgo-Camacho et al., 2021).

The third hypothesis was that the COVID-19 pandemic will have the greatest impact on the love/belonging needs of students. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly had a negative effect on students’ love and belonging needs, but whether the pandemic had the greatest effect on these needs was not determined. As the studies show, the pandemic also did greatly impact students’ physiological and security needs (Manze et al., 2021). But belonging needs were impacted as students could not get the same type of interaction as they could at in person-school. There was a lack of peer and teacher interaction that affected students. Discussion forums, Zoom meetings,
and grouping children into similar interest workshops all were helpful for interaction during the COVID online learning process (Shewell, 2020). Learning management systems and social media could also be of use to students, since they reported that they learned better with collaboration (Harun et al., 2021). Since the pandemic affected the belonging needs of students, educators should build empathy and be willing to listen to students (Russell et al., 2022). Social support was linked with college success and persistence. Staff who were flexible with deadlines, accommodative of students’ needs, and responsive to students' inquiries were a great help (Manze et al., 2021). Students often lacked belonging needs, which was more of an issue during the pandemic for students who were considered at risk. This was often students who suffered from their other basic needs not being met. The pandemic affected most students in some sort of way (If not basic needs, then it was love/belonging needs). Smaller class sizes and creating lessons that appeal to the specific interests of certain students can increase the likelihood of students’ love and belonging needs being achieved (Tyler, 2022). Many of the studies mentioned love/belonging needs as most affected by the pandemic, but the pandemic also affected many students financially. Furthermore, students who were not having their basic needs met before the pandemic, had an even more torrid time during the pandemic.

The fourth hypothesis, that studies will focus less on self-actualization, was also proven mostly correct. Only a few studies that mentioned hierarchy of needs during online learning in COVID had mentioned self-actualization as well. This is likely because self-actualization is hard to define and hard to measure. It also could be because of the reason that many people don’t reach self-actualization in their lives, as Maslow originally suggested. Self-actualization is just one theory of motivation, so many of the researchers in these studies may not have agreed with the idea that self-actualization is the peak need of humans. For Shewell (2020), self-actualization
meant creativity. Students needed to be intrinsically motivated and interested in what they were learning in order to be creative (Shewell, 2020). What was most intriguing was that esteem needs were also not mentioned very much in these research studies. This could be because the three previous levels of needs were hard to meet during the pandemic, especially love/belonging needs like this paper hypothesized. Russell et al. (2022) also echoed this sentiment. Shewell (2020) replaced self-esteem needs with self-reliance ones, meaning that students had to be self-starters and interested autonomous learners. One study viewed college persistence as an esteem need, and a possible self-actualization need as well. Yet, basic needs had to be met before college persistence took place (Russell et al., 2022). Ansorger (2021) defined self-actualization as when students fulfill their potential.

**Recommendations**

Nonetheless, future research studies should examine how COVID affects the esteem needs of students. Options for supporting students such as student emergency funds, option to not receive credit/grade, counseling, technology loaning from universities, public counseling programs, and unemployment benefits should be funded to support students. Especially in times of crisis. Students who have better support systems can pursue education better, while others need programs like the ones previously mentioned (Manze et al., 2021). Related to this, students who are culturally and linguistically diverse are often up against a discriminatory system that makes it hard for them to meet their basic needs. Federal and state governments need to focus on addressing poverty and inequality, so that students can have equal opportunity (Ansorger, 2021). Online mentoring programs that focus on social/emotional learning can increase students’ feeling
of connectedness (Tyler, 2022). More studies should focus on this way to increase belonging needs in online learning, and other ways as well.

There were cultural differences found in the online learning process as well. Malaysian students struggled more than European students, but this could also be due to prior exposure to distance learning already (Harun et al., 2021). Student home environment is also affected by cultural differences. For example, a distraction-free environment is hard to achieve for students who have more siblings, which is more common in non-Western countries (Harun et al., 2021). Students from Ecuador who were learning English online actually reported having more time to focus on assignments (Hidalgo-Camacho et al., 2021). In the United States, Cultural bias can also influence how likely students are to meet their love/belonging needs in school, with educators struggling to connect with and understand students who come from a different background from them. Regulations in online learning were not as strictly imposed on school districts that contained many culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ansorger, 2021). More research should be done on cultural differences in online learning. Multicultural research is a necessity in general, because students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, poverty-stricken countries, and with cultural backgrounds different from the country in which they reside are all currently not receiving an equal level of opportunity to meet their basic needs. In turn, making it harder for them to become all that they can be in school and beyond school.
References


