

## **Beyond Academics: A Holistic Examination of Values Among Business Students**

**Post-Pandemic**

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This study investigates the nuanced impact of the post-pandemic educational environment on the values of Business department students in a private women's university in Tokyo, Japan. The research, grounded in Schwartz's Value Theory, focuses on two cohorts: 2020 and 2022, with a particular emphasis on the 2020 cohort surveyed both before and after the pandemic. Utilizing Schwartz's Value Questionnaire, the study explores changes in personal values over time. Results reveal notable declines in various values among the 2022 cohort compared to their 2020 counterparts, encompassing dimensions of concern for others, tolerance, self-direction, stimulation, and conformity to rules. Conversely, values associated with face and power over resources exhibit insignificant yet positive changes. Within the 2020 cohort, significant reductions are observed in almost all values between their freshman and junior years, except for values related to power, tradition, and humility, which remain stable. The most substantial negative shifts are identified in self-expansion values, notably Universalism, Benevolence, Self-direction, and Stimulation. Values associated with personal and social security also experience a noticeable decrease. However, certain values, particularly tradition and humility, display resilience, remaining stable across different cohorts and years. Remarkably, the most significant negative change across all years and cohorts is observed in the value of self-direction of action, particularly evident in students who were freshmen in 2020 and surveyed during their junior year. This study contributes to our understanding of the evolving values of students in a post-pandemic academic landscape, emphasizing both significant declines and stable aspects within personal value systems. The findings provide insights for educational institutions seeking to support students' well-being and personal development in the midst of ongoing societal changes.

**Key words:** English learning motivation, universal value system, Covid-19 pandemic

## 1. Introduction

The study of English language proficiency motivation has long been a focal point in the Japanese English teaching community, attracting sustained attention over the years (Ushioda, 2013; Yazawa, 2019, Yazawa, 2021). The Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (SDT) stands as a contemporary theoretical framework in the realm of personal motivation within this context (Yazawa, 2021). According to SDT, fulfilling students' basic psychological needs not only bolsters their motivation to learn but also profoundly affects their overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Universal Values theory further underscores the crucial role of personal values, such as self-direction and benevolence, in connection with basic psychological needs, forming a cornerstone for motivation and educational achievement (Shwartz, 2022). During the developmental phase of emerging adulthood, a pivotal period for university students in Japan, individuals engage in a meticulous examination of personal beliefs, values, and potential worldviews or ideologies, laying the groundwork for significant life decisions and motivations in work or study (Arnett, 2011).

Despite the significance of this developmental phase in the lives of emerging Japanese adults, it has been somewhat overlooked in prior research on values and learning motivation among university students in Japan during and after the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022. The global impact of the pandemic prompted universities worldwide, including those in Japan, to swiftly adopt remote teaching and learning methods (MEXT, 2020). As the pandemic unfolded, students' learning environments shifted away from physical campuses, necessitating adaptation to web conferencing platforms like Zoom, introducing a new set of challenges for students (MEXT, 2020). Beyond the complexities of adjusting to home-based learning, students who had initially

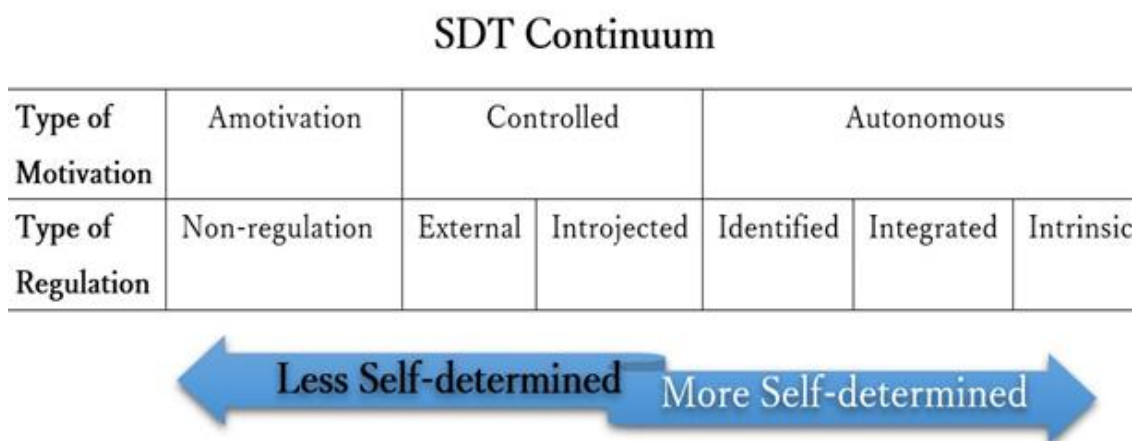
planned study abroad experiences for enhancing English language skills found their academic needs and personal aspirations unmet during this period. Remote learning environments, understandably, prioritized logistical aspects, neglecting a nuanced understanding of students' English learning situations and the development of effective support methods that enhance well-being and learning motivation. Compounded by the confinement to homes, students missed the active campus environment with its peer and teacher interactions, and the freedom associated with university life, as well as the international programs they had envisioned participating in.

Given these circumstances, an examination of motivation and personal values impacting learning outcomes before and after the COVID-19 pandemic becomes imperative. Such an analysis offers educators insights into the factors influencing university students' motivation in the English language classroom, laying the groundwork for further research into value-based motivational orientations and their influence on academic performance and overall well-being.

## 2. Literature Review

The Self-Determination Theory postulates that individuals are intrinsically motivated to learn and that this motivation is intricately linked to their sense of autonomy within the classroom environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation (Figure 1), where autonomous motivation involves voluntary initiation of actions, while controlled motivation stems from compliance with external expectations and perceived external pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Both autonomous and controlled motivations can drive learning, but the latter is associated with decreased psychological well-being and lower academic achievement (Yazawa, 2019). According to SDT, well-being encompasses subjective vitality, defined as a sense of meaning in life, and happiness (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

**Figure 1: Self-determination continuum**

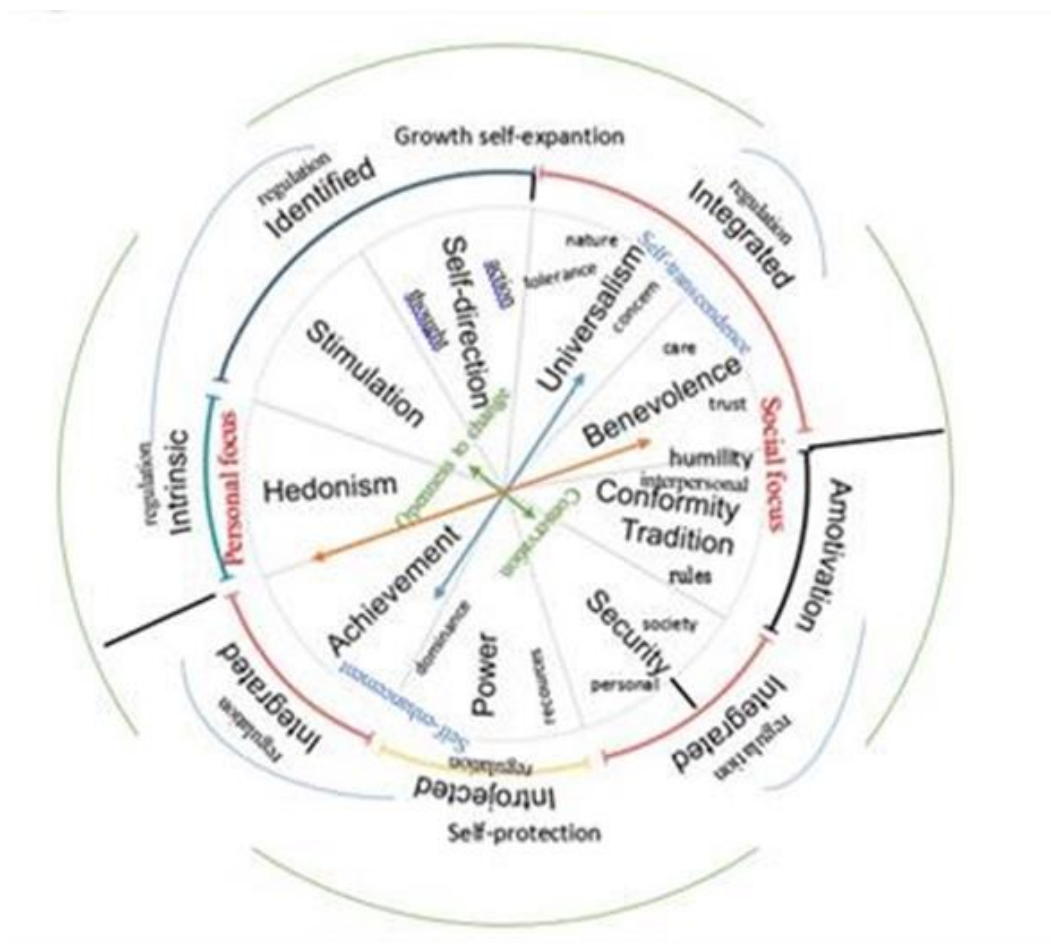


Research indicates that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and exposure to beauty and nature contribute to individuals' vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Weinstein et al., 2012). The theory posits three fundamental psychological needs underpinning autonomous motivation and contributing to an individual's optimal

functioning and psychological well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Yazawa, 2021). Autonomy relates to the need for choice and the ability to determine one's behavior. Competence involves facing adequate challenges and handling tasks to foster a sense of mastery. Relatedness refers to the aspiration for authentic connections with significant individuals, where one feels understood and accepted. Bergin (1991) argued that human values emphasizing autonomy, independence, equality, and relatedness contribute positively to well-being by satisfying these basic psychological needs.

Psychological needs, personal values, and goals are intricately intertwined (Figure 3): needs influence the development of values, and values, in turn, influence the pursuit of goals (Locke, 2000; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Specific psychological needs give rise to corresponding personal values, motivating the pursuit of related goals, and the attainment of goals leads to the acquisition of particular values, thus satisfying interdependent needs (Locke, 2000). Schwartz (1994) proposed ten distinct categories of universal values present across cultures, shaping perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and serving as standards for evaluating actions, individuals, and events. Schwartz and colleagues refined this theory, introducing a survey questionnaire measuring 19 basic human values (Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022), categorized into dimensions like openness to change versus conservation, self-enhancement versus self-transcendence, personal focus versus social focus, and growth versus self-protection (Schwartz, 2017) (Figure 2).

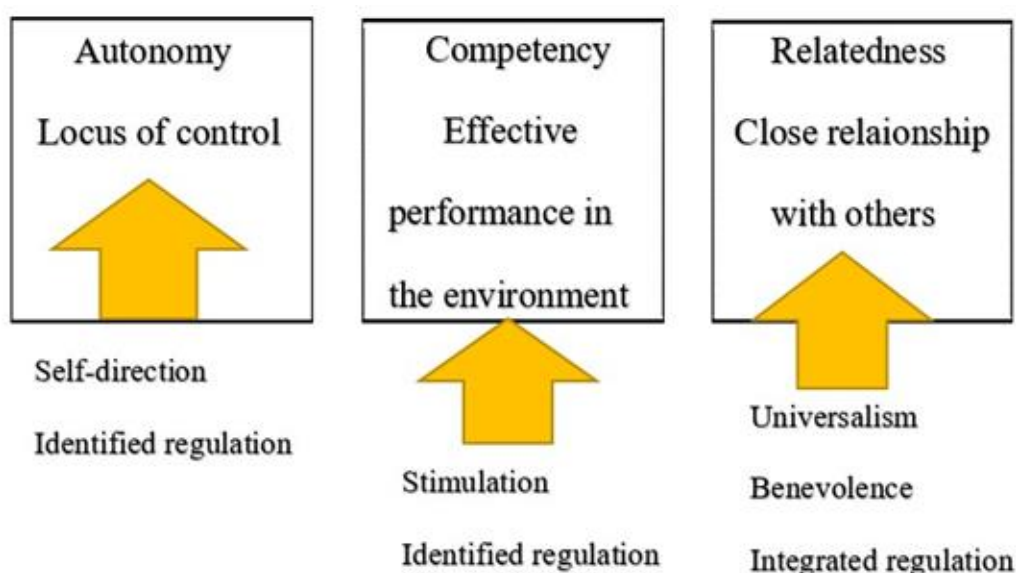
Figure 2: Schwartz value system



Maslow's motivational needs hierarchy (1970) characterizes personal needs as a desire to actualize one's latent potential and become all that one is capable of becoming (Maslow, 1970). Growth needs, not stemming from deficiency but a desire for personal development, include self-actualization, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of beauty. Deficiency needs arise from deprivation and encompass desires for security, social status, and esteem, akin to Schwartz's values of Safety, Tradition, Conformity, and Power. Scholars such as Bergin (1991) and Strupp (1980) argue that values

emphasizing autonomy, independence, equality, and benevolence contribute positively to well-being, while values emphasizing security or status are less beneficial. Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) contend that healthy values fulfill growth needs, while unhealthy values correspond to Maslow's deficiency needs. Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) draw parallels between SDT's basic psychological need satisfaction and Schwartz's value system: autonomy needs align with values of Stimulation and Self-direction, relatedness aligns with Benevolence, Tolerance, and Social Conformity, and competence partially aligns with Achievement (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Interconnection of SDT and Schwartz value system**



In a large-scale international study, Sortheix and Schwartz (2017) propose that self-transcendence, derived from values such as Universalism and Benevolence, along with openness to change values (Self-direction, Stimulation, and partially Hedonism), form a cluster of personal growth and expansion values associated with anxiety-free motivations and well-being across different countries. This suggests a parallel between Schwartz's growth values, Maslow's concept of growth needs, and the Self-

Determination theory of motivation, all driven by a desire for personal growth (Figure 3).

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced societal well-being, value systems, and overall mental health, with variations observed based on population characteristics (Robinson et al., 2022). Stringent measures like lockdowns have brought about substantial economic downturns, particularly affecting part-time employment for university students and leading to job losses, subsequently reducing income. The educational sector, with its stringent policies, has also contributed to reduced face-to-face social interactions and a pervasive sense of loneliness and social isolation, especially evident in temporary school closures and the declaration of the first state of emergency in Japan in 2020 (Kyodo News, 2020).

While these measures have proven effective in Japan not to spread the disease further, guided by cultural factors emphasizing group cohesion and concern for others, particularly influenced by peer pressure (Wright, 2021), there exists a potential downside. The impact of peer pressure on emerging adults who may not conform to social norms could hinder the growth of self-expansion values, openness to change, self-enhancement, and personal focus (Schwartz, 2017), leading to fear and resentment towards those perceived as outsiders or rule-breakers (Osaki, 2020), self-conservation, social focus rather than personal care, and self-protection (Schwartz, 2017).

The postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the ban on events gathering large crowds have further contributed to an unpredictable daily life, causing increased fear, anxiety, deteriorating mental health (Nagasu et al., 2021), heightened social isolation (Murayama et al., 2021), and a rise in suicide rates in Japan (Sakamoto et al., 2021).



In light of the reviewed literature, it becomes evident that fostering values of Benevolence, Stimulation, Universalism, and Self-direction, while supporting the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (refer to Figure 2 and Figure 3), is crucial for motivating students and enhancing their well-being in the classroom. Given the changing social conditions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that its adverse effects will be more pronounced in domains related to well-being, shifts in universal value systems, and overall motivation to study among university students. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the value systems of Japanese students at a specific university and examine whether different cohorts admitted prior to, during, and post the COVID-19 pandemic reveal changes in growth values within their personal value systems.

### **3. Hypothesis**

Given the observed negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the personal values and motivation of university students, as highlighted in the literature review and discussed results, we hypothesize that:

University students admitted during the late pandemic (2022 cohort) will exhibit a significant decline in values associated with well-being and motivation, such as Universalism-Tolerance, Self-Direction of Action, Self-Direction of Thought, Stimulation, and Hedonism, during their freshman year compared to students admitted before the pandemic (2020 cohort) during their corresponding freshman year.

Values related to power over money and resources will show a positive change for students admitted during the late pandemic (2022 cohort) in their freshman year compared to older students (2020 cohort) in their freshman year. This

positive change may be attributed to shifts in societal dynamics or altered perceptions of power during the pandemic.

The negative impact on personal values, especially those contributing to motivation, will persist over time. Students admitted at the beginning of the pandemic (2020 cohort) will continue to exhibit a decline in values related to Concern, Caring, Self-Determination of Thought (with the most significant change seen in Independence of Action), Stimulation, Hedonism, and Social Security during their junior year (2022) compared to their freshman year.

The pandemic-induced negative changes in personal values will have a lasting effect on students' motivation to study, as values associated with autonomy, stimulation, and social security are crucial contributors to academic motivation.

Overall, our hypothesis suggests that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting and detrimental impact on the personal values and motivation of university students, particularly those admitted during the pandemic. The study aims to provide empirical evidence supporting these hypotheses through a comprehensive analysis of personal values and motivation among university cohorts.

#### **4. Methodology and Instruments**

The study was conducted at a private women's university in Tokyo, Japan, focusing on freshmen from the Business Design department. The participants included the 2020 cohort (N=110)(F20) and the 2022 cohort (N =103)(F22), which were surveyed at the end of the spring semester in 2020 and 2022. The 2020(F20) cohort was examined twice, prior and post-pandemic in 2020 and 2022 when they were juniors (N=72)(J20), respectively. The 2022 cohort was surveyed once in 2022.

Informed by the theoretical framework, the study aimed to investigate the

significance of providing appropriate support for students' psychological needs to foster autonomous motivation for learning English and promoting well-being in a post-pandemic environment. The achievement of well-being was posited to rely on the cultivation and endorsement of growth values within students' personal value systems. To address these research objectives, the study employed Schwartz's Value Questionnaire, translated and validated in Japanese educational settings. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's research center, and consent forms in Japanese were included with both surveys. Participants were invited to voluntarily complete the questionnaires using Google Forms, with no incentives provided for participation.

To explore students' personal value systems, the study utilized the latest Japanese version of Schwartz's PVQ-R Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2017), known as the Manabe-Hommerich questionnaire (Appendix B). This questionnaire measured the 19 values defined in Schwartz's value theory using 57 items. Respondents assessed the degree of similarity between themselves and various individuals representing different dominant values on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "not like me at all" to "very much like me." The indirect method, known as the Portrait Values Questionnaire, aimed to ensure higher reliability and validity than the direct method. The questionnaire was a result of a collaborative longitudinal study between researchers from the University of Cologne (Germany), Hokkaido University, and Aoyama Gakuin University, incorporating intercultural comparisons across ten countries and 49 cultural groups. Empirical analyses confirmed the questionnaire's validity, reliability, circular structure, and measurement invariance across various cultural contexts.

For data analysis, mean scores were computed to compare respondents from

different cohorts at the time of enrollment in the university, aligning with Schwartz's (2012) recommendations for comparative value research using this scale. The data due to an insufficient number of participants, were considered as a work-in-progress study and evaluated in Microsoft Excel to assess the potential for a long-term study with an adequate number of participants. Finally, the study compared responses from all cohorts to investigate whether students in 2020 and 2022 differed in the ranking of psychologically healthy values such as Self-determination, Stimulation, Benevolence, and Universalism. This comparison aimed to provide a basis for discussing how the Covid pandemic contributed to the cultivation of growth values within students' personal value systems and, subsequently, their overall well-being.

## **5. Results**

This section presents the results of a comprehensive study conducted at a private women's university in Tokyo, Japan, focusing on freshwomen from the Business department. Comparative analysis revealed a shift in the ranking of values post-pandemic, suggesting potential influences on students' personal value systems. In scrutinizing variances within the value systems across distinct cohorts or academic years, the researcher adjudicated a discernible discrepancy when the variance equaled or surpassed 0.3. Conversely, a variance falling below 0.1 was characterized as inconsequential.

A conspicuous diminution in values was particularly evident among freshmen in 2022 as compared to their counterparts in 2020, with notable declines observed in values pertaining to concern for others (-0.36), tolerance (-0.46), self-direction of thought (-0.40), self-direction of action (-0.41), stimulation (-0.42), and conformity to rules (-0.37). Inconsequential yet positive alterations were noted in the values of face

(+0.11) and power over resources (+0.10).

A substantially more pronounced negative shift was observed within the same cohort surveyed during their freshman year in 2020 and in their junior year in 2022. Nearly all values exhibited a significant decrease, with the exception of values associated with power over people and resources, tradition, and humility (Table 1). The most prominent negative shifts were observed in values associated with self-expansion, notably Universalism (average of -0.57), Benevolence (-0.51), Self-direction (average of -0.77), Stimulation (-0.62), and even Hedonism (-0.64). Values related to personal and social security exhibited a noticeable decrease, with an average decline of 0.60. The adherence to conformity in interpersonal relationships and adherence to rules demonstrated a reduction in value by 0.49.

Interestingly, the values associated with tradition and humility did not exhibit any significant changes either across different cohorts or between distinct years. Across all years and cohorts, the most substantial negative change was discerned in the value of self-direction of action, notably registering a decrease of -0.84 in students who commenced their academic journey as freshmen in 2020 and were subsequently surveyed during their junior year.

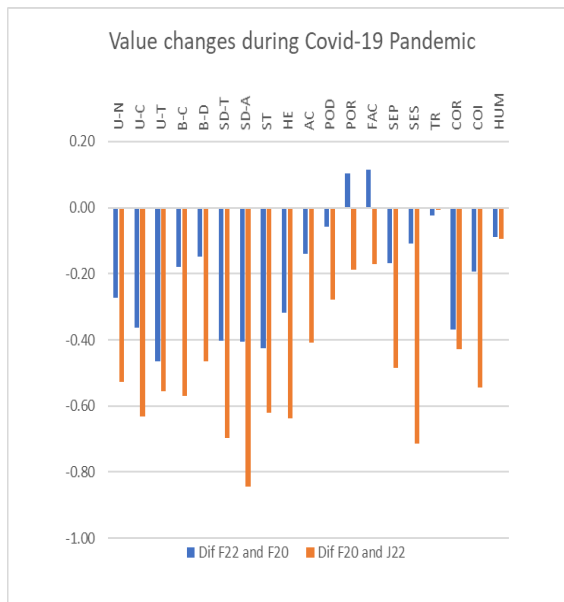
These findings suggest a nuanced impact of the post-pandemic environment on students' values, highlighting both significant declines and stable aspects within their personal value systems. Further research is warranted to explore the underlying factors contributing to these shifts and to inform targeted interventions for the well-being and personal development of students in the evolving educational landscape.

**Table 1: Results**

J22-F20	F22-F20	V	Value
<b>-0.53</b>	-0.27	U-N	Universalism-nature
<b>-0.63</b>	<b>-0.36</b>	U-C	Universalism-concern
<b>-0.56</b>	<b>-0.46</b>	U-T	Universalism-tolerance
<b>-0.57</b>	-0.18	B-C	Benevolence-care
<b>-0.46</b>	-0.15	B-D	Benevolence-dependability
<b>-0.70</b>	<b>-0.40</b>	SDT	Self-direction of thought
<b>-0.84</b>	<b>-0.41</b>	SDA	Self-direction of action
<b>-0.62</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	ST	Stimulation
<b>-0.64</b>	-0.32	HE	Hedonism
<b>-0.41</b>	-0.14	AC	Achievement
-0.28	<i>-0.06</i>	POP	Power over people
-0.19	<b>0.10</b>	POR	Power over resources
-0.17	<b>0.11</b>	FAC	Face
<b>-0.49</b>	-0.17	SEP	Personal security
<b>-0.71</b>	<i>-0.11</i>	SES	Social security
<i>-0.01</i>	<i>-0.02</i>	TR	Tradition
<b>-0.43</b>	<b>-0.37</b>	COR	Conformity Rules
<b>-0.54</b>	-0.19	COI	Interpersonal Conformity
<i>-0.09</i>	<i>-0.09</i>	HUM	Humility

Numbers in red indicate negative difference of more than 0.3  
 Numbers in bold indicate positive difference  
 Numbers in italic indicate difference of

less than 0.1



Blue line shows the difference in nominal value between freshmen in 2022 and freshmen in 2020. Orange indicates the difference between freshmen in 2020 and the same cohort in their junior year 2022.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The examination of cohort-based differences in personal values among university students provides valuable insights into the impact of external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on their value systems and motivation to study. A noteworthy observation is the negative difference seen in the 2022 cohort during their freshman year, particularly when compared to the 2020 cohort during their freshman year in 2020 (depicted by the blue line). This negative difference encompasses crucial values related to well-being and motivation, including Universalism-Tolerance, Self-Direction of Action, Self-Direction of Thought, Stimulation, and Hedonism.

The significant decline in these values for the 2022 cohort may be attributed to the circumstances surrounding the pandemic, which unfolded during their high school years. These students experienced disruptions in normal interactions with teachers and peers, transitioned to online classes, refrained from participating in club activities, and adhered to various pandemic-related protocols such as wearing masks. Such deviations from the typical high school experience likely contributed to the negative effect on their value system during their freshman year in university, especially when compared to the 2020 cohort.

Interestingly, values related to power over money and resources, as well as Face, show a positive difference between younger students in their freshman year and older students in their freshman year. Power and Face, positioned on the opposite spectrum of the value system from Self-Direction of Action, Thought, and Stimulation, exhibit positive changes. Speculatively, this positive change could be associated with factors such as shifts in societal dynamics during the pandemic, lack of economic stability, loss of part-time jobs, altered perceptions of power and money, or evolving social



interactions.

Conversely, the 2020 cohort, which experienced the pandemic during their freshman year, displayed an even larger negative difference in their junior year compared to their freshman year. This indicates a sustained negative impact on the value system of the 2020 cohort over the two years of university study coinciding with the pandemic. Notable differences are observed in values such as Concern, Caring, Self-Determination of Thought (with the most significant change seen in Independence of Action), Stimulation, Hedonism, and Social Security. These values, known to positively influence motivation to study, experienced a pronounced decline.

The pandemic's influence on students' value systems and, consequently, their motivation to study is evident. The values that positively affect motivation, such as independence, stimulation, and benevolence, have been adversely affected. The reasons behind these changes could be multifaceted, including the impact of the pandemic, restrictions on mobility, and the inability to pursue experiences like studying in Boston (mandatory study included in their university program).

In conclusion, the findings emphasize the importance of enhancing values through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Addressing these fundamental psychological needs in the classroom could serve as a foundation for rebuilding and strengthening personal values, subsequently positively impacting students' motivation to study. The study underscores the need for educational institutions to consider holistic strategies that go beyond academic aspects, acknowledging the intricate interplay between psychological well-being, personal values, and motivation in the aftermath of external disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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