

Simply Highlighting - Effects of Highlighting Choices in Distance Learning on Student Motivation

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Self-determination theory posits that the fulfillment of the need for autonomy increases student motivation. To support this need for autonomy, the provision of choice in learning environments is emphasized. Findings from several previous studies suggest that choice can have positive effects on students' motivation mediated by their perceived autonomy. However, implementing choice options in online learning environments requires considerable additional effort in the design of learning materials. Also, students might often not be aware of their opportunities to choose from different options such as the sequence of learning activities or contents. Therefore, the present study investigated whether simply highlighting choice opportunities in an online learning environment influences students' perceived autonomy and thus their motivation. The study was conducted as a Moodle-based field experiment in a self-paced online learning environment at a distance learning university. Undergraduate psychology students ($N = 508$) were randomly assigned to the highlighting condition or the no highlighting condition. In both conditions, an advance organizer detailed the content and tasks of the online learning environment. In addition, in the highlighting condition, all aspects where students had choices were made explicit. Results indicate that the highlighting condition fostered students' perceived autonomy. Moreover, the perceived autonomy mediated the effect of choice on students' motivation. Students with higher perceived autonomy reported more positive emotions, higher interest, greater intrinsic motivation and fewer negative emotions. The implications of these findings for future research and the implementation of choices in psychology distance learning are discussed.

References:

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Is the first author also the speaker?

Yes

If first author is not the speaker, please indicate speaker's name here:

Please indicate up to five keywords regarding the content of your contribution

Choice, Perceived autonomy, Motivation, Self-determination theory, Autonomy support

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