



Students Can Benefit from Choosing the Types of Assignments They Complete

What is this Research About?

Providing students with more control over the assessments they complete can increase students' engagement, motivation, and responsibility for their learning. One way to give students this control is to use an assessment choice approach, which allows students to choose the types of assignments they complete. Assessment choice may also allow students to balance their course work with responsibilities outside of school. In this research, students chose between multiple formats such as exams, interviews, poster presentations, and essays for the assessments in their course.

What did the Researchers Do?

In a university online business course, students were given the choice of three assignment formats for each of the three assessments in the course. Two of the assessments were individual tasks and one was a group project. The researchers analyzed the grades achieved by the 139 students in the course and the proportion of students who chose each assignment format. The researchers also analyzed the comments students wrote on an end of semester feedback survey, which was completed by 45% of the students.

What did the Researchers Find?

The researchers found that for all three assessments, the average grade achieved was similar across all assignment formats. The proportion of students who chose each type of assessment varied, with a large majority of students choosing to complete a quiz instead of an essay or article analysis. When students were asked in the survey to describe the best aspect of the course, 55% of comments related to assessment choice. Students mentioned benefits such as choosing formats that fit their strengths or personal needs, trying new types of assignments, or experiencing reduced stress by choosing an alternative to an exam. However, when asked what could be improved in the course, some students mentioned unclear instructions for all assignment formats and that they spent too much time trying to choose a format.

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A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

An assessment choice approach allows students to choose between different types of assignments and can give students control over their learning. In this research, students reported benefits from being able to choose between assignment formats. All assignment formats were designed to still meet the intended learning outcomes for each assessment. Students reported wanting clear instructions and requirements for all assignment formats. Instructors should carefully describe the assessment choices in the course outline and/or in an introduction video. Keeping the assessment choice approach simple can prevent students from being overwhelmed by too many options and keep grading manageable.

➔ Citation

Jopp, R., & Cohen, J. (2020). Choose your own assessment – Assessment choice for students in online higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1742680>

➔ Keywords

assessment choice
online learning

higher education



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TEACHING AND LEARNING



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Snapshot Publication Date: 2020