

THE IMPACT OF IMPLICIT THEORIES ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

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Abstract

This paper looks at the influence of student implicit theories on student achievement on different types of graded assignments, papers which are more active learning and in-class exams which are more passive learning. Personality of students has an impact on their academic achievement. One aspect of personality that has been examined is learning style. Learning styles are a student's accustomed or preferred ways of thinking, processing of information and acquiring knowledge about a particular topic in their studies.

Some students study according to an agentic style, preferring passive learning such as memorization and fact retention where as others prefer more holistic elaborative processing to aid in understanding (Schmeck & Ribich, 1978; Schmeck, Ribich & Ramanaiah, 1977). Learning styles can impact on the types of classroom assignments that students prefer (Ackerman & Hu, 2011) and they can also have an influence on student achievement (Lockhart & Schmeck, 1984).

Dweck (2000) reported that there are two frameworks for understanding intelligence and achievement. The first view is the theory of fixed intelligence or entity theory which states that intelligence is a fixed trait and is portrayed as an entity that dwells within an individual and it cannot be changed (Bandura & Dweck, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Based on this theory, students can worry about much of this fixed intelligence they and their group members have because if they do not have enough of this trait, then the capability and potential for achievement and success are limited.

Individual performance in a marketing course can be directly impacted by a student's implicit theories. Students who have a malleable theory of intelligence and abilities do better academically than those who have a more entitative or fixed view of intelligence and abilities (Dupeyrat & Marine 2004). This occurs not just on any particular assignment or exam but can occur over a period of years in a student's academic career (Blackwell & Dweck 2007). Intervention, in the form of training to help students to form more malleable views of their abilities, can help students to improve their academic performance over time (Yeager, Johnson, Spitzer, Trzesniewski, Powers & Dweck, 2014).

This study extends this literature by looking at the differences student implicit theories make on student performance on exams versus assignments that are done outside of class. Exams are passive learning, which means that students must prepare beforehand and memorize facts. On the other hand, out-of-class assignments require a degree of active learning and perhaps creative or analytical thinking. Is it possible that exams create the kind of stress that would lead students who hold entity theories to do less well, but that out-of-class assignments especially if they are active learning in nature, allow entity theorists to do as well or perhaps even better than incremental theorists? This exploratory field study examines this possibility.

Students were given extra credit to fill out an in-class survey regarding their perceptions of regarding how fixed or malleable they felt student abilities were. Scores were then recorded for each of the students, names were kept anonymous. Students were then given a written memo, a 2 page report, a quiz, and a case write up over the course of the following few weeks. All of the assignments had very specific and objective grading criteria. Results suggest that performance on a quiz varied by implicit theories held by students, but that other types of assignments do not.

The results of this study are interesting not so much for its significant results, but for what was not significant. The implicit theories of students did not seem to have an impact on their performance on any of the active-learning assignments. The results were not even close as in directional but not significant so that a larger sample size would make them significant. By contrast, the effect of implicit theory on quiz was significant and it was a fairly large effect. Those with entitative views on student abilities, that they were fixed, performed worse than those who had incremental views that these abilities were malleable.

The take away for marketing instructors is that active learning assignments, perhaps out of class assignments, may be a fairer way to assess students in their classes. Students who are entity theorists are more concerned with image-management and perhaps more concerned with “blowing it” in a one-shot exam. Marketing instructors could create courses in which more of the grade is comprised of active learning assignments that are more flexible, utilize a variety of sources, and is done on the time schedule of the student. This will reduce the pressure over a large percentage of their grade being decided in a one or two hour exam, reducing anxiety and the impact on their self-image.

References Available upon Request