DOES COURSE DESIGN INCREASE OR DECREASE STUDENT STRESS? THE EXPLORATION OF CONTEXT AND STUDENT PERCEPTION OF LEARNING STRESS IN ONLINE AND TRADITIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

The study addresses whether or not the modality of course delivery and its design is associated with the student's perception of learning stress in two disparate learning environments: online and traditional classroom settings. Undoubtedly, contemporary student life does not seem to be stress-free. Various effects of stress on learning process have been detected to date. However, there is scarce empirical research regarding the relationship concerning perceived learning stress and course design.

Two distinct groups of learners at a northeastern (USA) university were measured. Each group was enrolled in the same information technology course. One group received instructional materials and course content online only, while the other group received the same learning materials in a traditional classroom.

The overall results show a significant difference in the perceived level of stress associated with the online learning group (M=2.23, SD=0.299) and the students who participated in the course delivered in the classroom environment (M=2.81, SD=0.804); t (96) = 2.275, p=0.025. With an inevitable presence of stress in the student population, these findings suggest new avenues for exploring and understanding what aspects of course design are associated with the student perception of stress and how stress modifies learning outcomes in various learning environments.

Keywords: Online learning, learning stress, course design, teaching methods, instructional materials.