

The Relationship Between Learning Approach and Students' Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

The process of learning is one of the significant issues that has intrigued educational psychologists and has widespread recognition among researchers. Cognitive style plays an important role in deciding learning approach or preferred ways of organizing and processing information. Psychologists and educators have long realized the significance of self-regulation and motivation in explaining academic achievement. Contemporary research based on student approaches to learning framework suggest that students' adoption of deep (meaningful learning) or surface (rote learning) approaches is contingent on their experience with regard to their interaction with the teaching and learning environment—in that it plays a mediator role in predicting academic performance. However, the potential for style and approach to impact on learners' performance in educational settings is controversial among researchers. Equally, an unresolved aspect in learning is the influence of motivation in mediating the learning experience-academic performance relation. Results of empirical research into the relationships between cognitive and learning style and performance is inconsistent in its outcomes. Research evidence suggests that the link between learning and cognitive style is complex and warrants further study (Spicer, 2004; Biggs, 2001; Ning & Downing, 2012). The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of learning approaches and academic achievement among undergraduate third year students from a University in Kenya. Specifically, this research aims to explore the relationship between students' performance (as assessed by their mark on a finance course unit) and two different, but linked, measures of style, representing “cognitive style”, “thinking style” and their “learning approach”. The paper will present and discuss the results of an exploration of the relationships between two conceptualizations of learning and cognition (including the mediating role of motivation) and students' academic performance.