

Using Contract Grading in Undergraduate HDFS Courses: Perceptions from HDFS Students

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Abstract

Drawing on tenets of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) model, instructors evaluated the effectiveness of contract grading in undergraduate HDFS courses. Contract grading has been linked to enhanced student learning and reduced anxiety levels in performance. This study examines how contract grading is associated with student performance, participation, and anxiety.

What is contract grading?

Contract grading allows for students to have a choice in the classroom; the student chooses how they wish to demonstrate their achievement of course objectives, including the grade they wish to work towards during the semester (Ware, 2011).

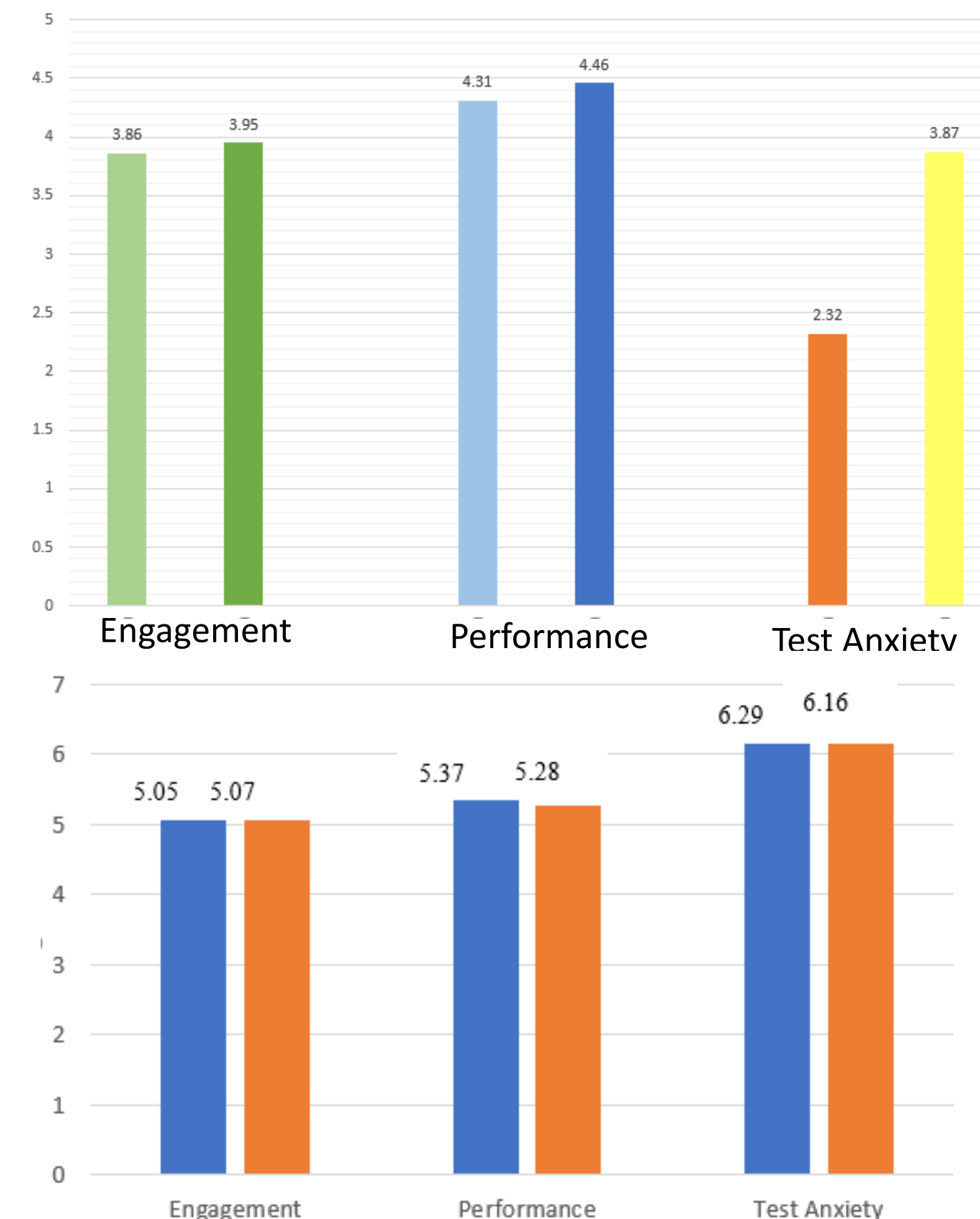
Study Rationale

- Research demonstrates that contract grading has been found to positively influence commitment, motivation, positive decision making, and action-taking in the classroom (Frank & Scharff, 2013).
- Although utilized in various disciplines, contract grading has not been researched specifically in HDFS.

Methods

We examined the effectiveness of contract grading across five different HDFS courses. A total of 72 students provided data for at least one wave in Fall 2017 (n = 57 at wave 1; n = 41 at wave 2; and n = 24 at wave 3) and 87 students provided data for at least one wave in Spring 2018 (n = 49 at wave 1; n = 34 at wave 2; and n = 54 at wave 3). Measures used were Student Learning (Handelsman et al., 2005) and student Stress and Confidence (Zajacova et al., 2005).

Quantitative Results



Qualitative Results

Emerging themes included increased self-efficacy, heightened anxiety, no perceived effect. While some students reported contract grading being a positive experience, other participants found contract grading to be stressful. Several students noted that contract grading did not influence their approach to the course.

Discussion and Implications

- Contract grading can be a useful tool in promoting student self-efficacy and self-directed learning in HDFS courses. Specially, students perceived greater control over their grade.
- Some students viewed contract grading with heightened stress and anxiety, however.
- Future research could explore alternative approaches to grading that students may experience favorably and examine which specific context contract grading may be most effective.

References

- Frank, T., & Scharff, L. F. V. (2013). Learning contracts in undergraduate courses: Impacts on student behaviors and academic performance. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 13*(4), 36-53.
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