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Fulmer, Sara M.; Tulis, Maria

Adding nuance to the challenge-skill relationship: the interaction of perceived and actual skill.

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Summary: Optimal motivation occurs when there is a balance between perceived challenge and perceived skill. The challenge-skill relationship has been studied extensively with regard to perceived skill, with limited attention given to *actual* (i.e., domain-specific) skill. The present study investigated the role of actual skill within the perceived difficulty \times perceived skill relationship. Consistent with our predictions, actual skill moderated the perceived difficulty \times perceived skill relationship for the outcomes of intrinsic motivation, boredom, and persistence during a mathematics task. Furthermore, those with high perceived skill and low actual skill reported the most advantageous motivational outcomes. Together, these findings indicate that the challenge-skill relationship is more complex than we had previously thought once we consider both perceived and actual skill.

Classification: D53 C23 C43

Keywords: difficulty; challenge; challenge-skill balance; skill; motivation

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