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Effects of Instructor Presence in Video Lectures: Rapport, Attention, and Learning

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Abstract

Do students learn better from video lectures when an on-screen instructor is socially present—that is, when students can see the instructor’s face and eye gaze during the lecture? The present study explores how access to the instructor’s face and eye gaze affects students’ feelings of social rapport, attention to the lesson, and learning outcomes. The study compares a video lecture about the human kidney where students either have access to the instructor’s face and eye gaze during the lecture or do not (i.e., the instructor does not face the camera). Students reported higher levels of engagement, directed more eye fixations to the lecture material rather than the instructor (based on eye-tracking metrics), and performed better on both retention and transfer posttests after viewing a video lecture with a socially present, on-screen instructor. Results suggest that social cues play a role in guiding academic learning from instructional video.