

# Exploring the Impact of Videos on the Psychological Contract of Students in Online Human Resource Classes

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**Abstract.** This study examines the impacts of instructional videos on students' psychological contracts in online Human Resource classes. The psychological contract, which is based on propositions about reciprocal obligations and benefits in exchange relationships, is utilized in the educational setting. Using Psychological Contract Theory and Social Exchange Theory as theoretical lenses, we used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to investigate the experiences and perspectives of 22 undergraduate students enrolled in online Human Resource courses at the same university. The data was collected through structured interviews and evaluated using the constant comparative approach. Three significant themes emerged: (1) the significance of personal videos in establishing and strengthening students' psychological contracts, (2) the distinct characteristics of online students, who frequently balance work and study, and (3) restricted participation in typical university activities. The findings imply that professor-generated movies have a significant impact on students' expectations, engagement, and perceived academic performance. This study adds to the expanding body of work on psychological contracts in higher education by providing insights into the advancing the online education. It has practical implications for educators and organizations looking to improve online learning experiences through the effective utilization of video content.

**Keywords:** video utilization, human resource courses, psychological contract, qualitative research, virtual student engagement.

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an institutional change in higher education, transforming online learning from a niche product to a mainstream necessity as typified by a report that in spring 2020, 84% of college students had transferred some or all of their classes to online-only instruction (National Center for Education Statistics 2022). This rapid shift transformed the educational landscape with ramifications that transcended the prevailing crisis and entrenched pandemic era internet-led education into a post-pandemic prominent presence. As of the 2022-23 academic year, 53% of U.S. students had taken at least one online course, up from 35% in 2018-19 (pre-pandemic) (Coffey 2024; Lockee 2021), a persistence that reflected a long-term revolution in higher education delivery

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channels. Within this changing setting, instructional videos became increasingly important since videos would provide flexibility and convenience, allowing students to study at their own pace and refresh content as needed (Dos Santos 2022). This asynchronous strategy was especially useful for non-traditional students who must balance employment, family, and academic responsibilities (Tosto *et al.* 2023).

Nonetheless, the rapid transition to online learning has not been without challenges. Students have reported challenges with less engagement with professors and peers, which may have an influence on their sense of belonging to the learning community (Bergdahl 2022; Hennessy & Murphy 2023; Tosto *et al.* 2023; Dos Santos 2022). Hu *et al.* (2022) found that the pandemic had a major impact on students' learning quality, with emotional elements like anxiety and happiness highly correlated with learning difficulties. The acknowledged benefits and shortcomings of online instruction warrants a continued evaluation of online teaching methodologies to ensure effective learning outcomes. As higher education navigates the current era of hybrid or exclusive internet-facilitated learning, it is prudent to evaluate the impact of instructional videos on students' psychological contracts – their beliefs of mutual obligations between themselves and their educational institutions – which may shape their engagement, motivation, and overall educational experience in the post-pandemic landscape.

The psychological contract, first suggested by Argyris (1960) and later elaborated by Schein (1978) – as cited in Savarimuthu and Rachael (2017) – and Rousseau (1989) – as cited in KV & Vikas (2021) –, referring to the unspoken expectations held by partners in a relationship, such as employer and employee or teacher and student, has developed as an important framework for understanding the reciprocal expectations of individuals and organizations. This concept in education (including both transactional and relational expectations between students and teachers) is becoming more relevant in education as modern pedagogical approaches evolve, particularly in online learning contexts (Lekang *et al.* 2024). These expectations cover course content, academic performance, and behaviors that promote a healthy learning environment (Demirkasmolu 2014; Lekang *et al.* 2024). In educational classes, videos have a significant impact on students' perceptions and interactions with their teachers, influencing the fulfillment of both transactional and relational parts of the psychological contract (Costa & Oliveira 2022). Videos can be used to foster a sense of connection between students and educators, which is essential for the relational quality of the psychological contract (Sewpersad *et al.* 2019). This study hopes to add to existing research by investigating: (1) How students describe their psychological contract with online courses related to class videos; and (2) What students perceive videos to have contributed to their academic success. By addressing these questions, we seek to provide insights into optimizing online course delivery and student engagement in post-pandemic higher education. While appreciating that this is a pilot study, our findings give useful preliminary

insights, in light of the limitations of generalizing from a focused qualitative sample. This work serves as a platform for future research, with the goal of broadening our understanding of psychological contracts in online education across varied contexts and groups.

## 2. Literature Review

### *The Effects of Videos and Instructor Presence*

Recent research has explored the impact of videos on learning outcomes in online HR classes. Studies have repeatedly shown that shorter movies are more engaging and beneficial for student learning (Guo *et al.* 2014; Yu & Gao 2022; Zhu *et al.* 2022). For example, Zhu *et al.* (2022) discovered that short movies (under 5 minutes) resulted in a 24.7% increase in viewing time and a 9% improvement in final exam grades when compared to longer videos. Similarly, Yu and Gao (2022) found that in a flipped classroom scenario, short videos resulted in considerably higher English competence, student engagement, and satisfaction than medium (10-20 minutes) or long (more than 30 minutes). Slemmons *et al.* (2018) advanced crucial insights about the effect of video length on middle-level science classrooms. While there were no significant differences in short-term retention between short and long movies, the researchers discovered that shorter videos resulted in greater long-term retention for male students and those with learning impairments. Importantly, students reported stronger engagement, increased focus, and perceived better knowledge retention with shorter videos.

The usage of interactive videos has also showed promise in improving learning outcomes with Zhang *et al.* (2006) finding that students who used interactive videos performed much better in terms of learning and satisfaction than those who used non-interactive or no videos at all. This shows that simply having video information is insufficient; how students interact with the material is critical to its success. Instructor presence in videos has been associated with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) paradigm, which advances the relevance of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in online learning environments (Shek *et al.*, 2023). The usage of instructor-created videos can improve teaching presence and possibly build the psychological bond between students and teachers. Ramly *et al.* (2023) found that educational movies in online learning helped students understand issues better and enhanced their interest in the learning content.

### *Psychological Contracts in Educational Contexts*

The concept of psychological contracts, which was previously used in organizational contexts, has acquired popularity in educational research, notably in higher education (Koskina 2013). Psychological contracts in education are the imagined reciprocal duties of students, professors, and institutions (Yale 2020).

These contracts include a detailed set of transactional, relational, and ideological expectations that influence students' experiences and conduct (Koskina 2013). With existing research into psychological contracts in student experiences yielding numerous noteworthy findings, O'Toole and Prince (2015) noted that students saw themselves as active participants in a social exchange rather than passive recipients of education. This viewpoint questions the "student-as-consumer" image and proposes a more nuanced understanding of student-institution connections (McCulloch 2009, as cited in O'Toole & Prince 2015).

According to studies, fulfilling or breaching the psychological contract can have a major impact on student satisfaction, engagement, and retention. Yale (2020) found that 100% of the students in their study had experienced some type of psychological contract breach, demonstrating the prevalence of this occurrence. The effects of such breaches ranged from negative feelings to doubting the worth of their degree and considering leaving the institution. Itzkovich (2021) identified four critical characteristics of student expectations in their psychological contracts: fairness, teaching quality, faculty knowledge, and deviant expectations (for example, grade inflation). These findings offer a framework for understanding the nature of student expectations in higher education. Appreciating the necessity of good communication in developing and managing psychological contracts, Bathmaker (1999) observed that ambiguity and uncertainty in the academic setting could cause concern among both faculty and students. Also, Yale (2020) observed that explicit articulation of role expectations early in the student-tutor interaction resulted in stronger psychological contracts and higher outcomes.

While previous study has looked into several aspects of psychological contracts in education, there is a significant void in the literature about the impact of videos on students' psychological contracts, particularly in online human resource classes. As the popularity of online education grows, it is worth studying how video content affects students' impressions of their educational exchange. This gap provides an opportunity for researchers to investigate how video-based education shapes, reinforces, or potentially breaches students' psychological contracts in online learning environments.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) is based on the work of Argyris (1957) and Blau (1964), with Blau's Social Exchange Theory (SET) providing a framework for understanding the psychological contract as a negotiated exchange between parties. Schein *et al.* (1965) expanded on the notion, defining it as an unwritten set of expectations between members of an organization and its supervisors. Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994) elaborated on this, describing psychological contracts as ideas regarding promises made and obligations held by individuals and institutions. Psychological contracts are developed by interactions inside a