

Learning on the Go: Practicing Vocabulary with Mobile Apps

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Abstract : The lack of college readiness is one of the major contributors to low graduation rates at community colleges, especially among educationally and financially disadvantaged students. About 45% of underprepared high school graduates are required to complete 'remedial' reading/writing courses before they can begin taking college-level courses. Mobile apps present 'bite-size' learning materials that can be useful for practicing certain literacy skills, such as vocabulary learning. The convenience of mobile phones is ideal for a majority of students at community colleges who hold full or part-time jobs. Mobile apps allow students to learn during small 'chunks' of time available to them outside of the class—during subway commute, between classes, etc. Learning with mobile apps is a relatively new area in research, and their effectiveness for learning new words has been inconclusive. Using Mishra & Koehler's TPACK theoretical framework, this study explored the effectiveness of the mobile app (Quizlet) for learning one hundred common college-level words in 'remedial' writing class over one semester. Each week, before coming to class, students studied a list of 10-15 words presented in context within sentences. Students came across these words in the article they read in class making their learning more meaningful. A pre and post-test measured the number of words students knew, learned and remembered. Statistical analysis shows that students performed better by 41% on the post-test indicating that the mobile app was helpful for learning words. Students also completed a short survey each week that sought to determine the amount of time students spent on the vocabulary app. A positive correlation was found between the amount of time spent on the mobile app and the number of words learned. The goal of this research is to capitalize on the convenience of smartphones to (1) better prepare them for college-level course work, and (2) contribute to current literature on mobile learning.

Keywords : mobile learning, vocabulary learning, literacy skills, Quizlet

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