

The Effect of Mobile Technology as an Active Student Response System on the Acquisition of U.S. History Content of Secondary Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) typically learn less history content than their peers without disabilities and show fewer learning gains. Even when they are provided with the same instructional strategies, many students with SLD struggle to grasp complex historical concepts and content area vocabulary. Many strategies involving technology have been used in the past to enhance learning for students with SLD in history classrooms. However, very few studies have explored the effectiveness of emerging mobile technology in K-12 history classrooms.

This study investigated the effects of mobile devices (iPads) as an active student response (ASR) system on the acquisition of U.S. history content of middle school students with SLD. An alternating treatments single subject design was used to compare the effects of two interventions. There were two conditions and a series of pretest probes in this study. The conditions were: (a) direct instruction and studying from handwritten notes using the interactive notebook strategy and (b) direct instruction and studying using the Quizlet App on the iPad. There were three dependent variables in this study: (a) percent correct on tests, (b) rate of correct responses per minute, and (c) rate of errors per minute.

A comparative analysis suggested that both interventions (studying from interactive notes and studying using Quizlet on the iPad) had varying degrees of effectiveness in increasing the learning gains of students with SLD. In most cases, both interventions were equally effective. During both interventions, all of the participants increased their percentage correct and increased their rate of correct responses. Most of the participants decreased their rate of errors.

The results of this study suggest that teachers of students with SLD should consider a post lesson review in the form of mobile devices as an ASR system or studying from handwritten notes paired with existing evidence-based practices to facilitate students' knowledge in U.S. history. Future research should focus on the use of other interactive applications on various mobile operating platforms, on other social studies subjects, and should explore various testing formats such as oral question-answer and multiple choice.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study have implications for history classrooms serving students with SLD. This study suggests that the use of a mobile, multimedia ASR system, such as the Quizlet App on the iPad, may help secondary students with SLD study U.S. history content and increase their scores on various assessments. History teachers should consider implementing the use of mobile devices as an ASR review system into their classrooms to enhance content area learning gains and build fluency. However, teachers should be cautious in relying too heavily or solely on mobile devices as they are not the singular determining factor in student achievement. Although instructional technology did have a positive effect on learning gains, it is not a panacea for helping students with SLD overcome substantial deficits in academic abilities. Teachers of students with disabilities should adopt universal instructional strategies that benefit a wide range of learners and allow for multiple means of representation, interaction, and expressions of learning.

In essence, introducing mobile devices in content area classrooms may benefit all learners and provide teachers with an additional strategy to meet diverse needs and diverse learning styles. Learners with various levels of academic ability may use mobile devices to learn at their own pace while using the same classroom devices as their peers (Draper Rodriguez, Strnadova, & Cummings, 2014). This may foster feelings of inclusion, motivation, increased student participation, and increased opportunities for success (Draper Rodriguez et al., 2014). Through the implementation of mobile devices, content area material can be more engaging, flexible, and accessible in a variety of formats for students with

varying levels of academic abilities being served in K-12 classrooms.

Geographical Literacy, Attitudes, and Experiences of Freshman Students: A Qualitative Study at Florida International University

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the geography literacy, attitudes and experiences of Florida International University (FIU) freshman students scoring at the low and high ends of a geography literacy survey. The Geography Literacy and ABC Models formed the conceptual framework. Participants were freshman students enrolled in the Finite Math course at FIU. Because it is assumed that students who perform poorly on geography assessments do not have an interest in the subject, testing and interviewing students allowed the researcher to explore the assumption.

In Phase I, participants completed the Geography Literacy Survey (GLS) with items taken from the 2010 NAEP Geography Subject Area Assessment. The low 35% and high 20% performers were invited for Phase II, which consisted of semi-structured interviews. A total of 187 students participated in Phase I and 12 in Phase II.

The primary research question sought to examine geography attitudes and experiences of freshman students scoring at the low and high ends of a geographical literacy survey. Overall, the students had positive attitudes regardless of how they performed on the GLS.

The study included a quantitative sub-question regarding the performance of the students on the GLS. The students' performance on the GLS was equivalent to the performance of 12th grade students from the NAEP Assessment. There were three qualitative sub-questions from which the following themes were identified: the students' definition of geography is limited, students recall more out of school experiences with geography, and students find geography valuable. In addition, there were five emergent themes: there is a concern regarding a lack of geographical knowledge, rote memorization of geographical content is overemphasized, geographical concepts are related to other subjects, taking the high school level AP Human Geography course is powerful, and there is a need for real-world applications of geographical knowledge.

The researcher offered as suggestions for practice to reposition geography in our schools to avoid misunderstandings, highlight its interconnectedness to other fields, connect the material to real world events/daily decision-making, make research projects meaningful, partner with local geographers, and offer a mandatory geography courses at all educational levels.

Implications for Practice

For geography to have a stronger presence in our schools, it has to be mandatory at every level. Requiring that the American education system offers one mandatory geography course in middle school, one in high school, and one in college should be considered reasonable. If geography continues to be an elective (e.g., AP Human Geography), then students will not understand how fundamental it is to have geographical understanding. Simply offering courses is not the solution. A combination of factors is needed to improve the current state of geography education. One major factor is having highly qualified geography teachers.

Among the recommendations for future research was to focus on social studies/geography teachers by exploring their geographical literacy, attitudes and experiences. This insight would provide relevant information regarding preservice teachers' preparation and inservice teachers' professional development opportunities, whether formal or informal. In addition, six recommendations for practice were presented: reposition geography in our schools to avoid further misunderstandings, highlight the interconnectedness of geography to other fields and vice-versa, connect the material to real world events/daily decision-making, make research projects meaningful by having students apply geography, partner with local geographers, and offer a mandatory geography course in middle school, high school and college.

Investigating the Effects of Cognitive Apprenticeship-Based Instructional Coaching on Science Teaching Efficacy Beliefs

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this collected papers dissertation was to examine the utility of a cognitive apprenticeship-based instructional coaching (CAIC) model for improving the science teaching efficacy beliefs (STEB) of preservice and inservice elementary teachers. Many of these teachers perceive science as a difficult subject and

feel inadequately prepared to teach it. However, teacher efficacy beliefs have been noted as the strongest indicator of teacher quality, the variable most highly correlated with student achievement outcomes. The literature is scarce on strong, evidence-based theoretical models for improving STEB.

This dissertation is comprised of two studies. STUDY #1 was a sequential explanatory mixed-methods study investigating the impact of a reformed CAIC elementary science methods course on the STEB of 26 preservice teachers. Data were collected using the Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (STEBI-B) and from six post-course interviews. A statistically significant increase in STEB was observed in the quantitative strand. The qualitative data suggested that the preservice teachers perceived all of the CAIC methods as influential, but the significance of each method depended on their unique needs and abilities.

STUDY #2 was a participatory action research case study exploring the utility of a CAIC professional development program for improving the STEB of five Bahamian inservice teachers and their competency in implementing an inquiry-based curriculum. Data were collected from pre- and post-interviews and two focus group interviews. Overall, the inservice teachers perceived the intervention as highly effective. The scaffolding and coaching were the CAIC methods portrayed as most influential in developing their STEB, supporting that relationships aspects are very important in successful instructional coaching programs. The teachers also described the CAIC approach as integral in supporting their learning to implement the new inquiry-based curriculum.

The overall findings hold important implications for science education reform, including its potential to influence how preservice teacher training and inservice teacher professional development in science are perceived and implemented. Additionally, given the noteworthy results obtained over the relatively short durations, CAIC interventions may also provide an effective means of achieving improvements in preservice and inservice teachers' STEB more expeditiously than traditional approaches.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this collected papers dissertation have significant implications for positively influencing elementary science education. Foremost, they provide a practical and potentially highly-transferrable approach to directly influence science teaching efficacy beliefs among inservice and preservice teachers. Though the

nuances of employing CAIC cannot be divorced from the local contexts of implementation, the methods (modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, exploration) can be applied universally. Additionally, as a novel application of instructional coaching practices to preservice teacher training, the CAIC model warrants further exploration as a potentially viable reform-based alternative to the traditional elementary science methods courses. This new approach causes science teacher educators to view students as apprentices (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989), which can ultimately change the way preservice teacher training and learning is perceived.

CAIC may also change the way professional development as support for inservice teachers is perceived and presented. If further investigations support the efficacy of this model, then a strong instructional coaching alternative can emerge to the traditional models of delivering job-embedded professional development for teachers.

Online Education Accrediting Standards, and Student Success: An Examination of the Relationship Between the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Standards for Online Education and Student Success

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Abstract

Prior to 2000, there were less than 1.6 million students enrolled in at least one online course. By fall 2010, student enrollment in online distance education showed a phenomenal 283% increase to 6.1 million. Two years later, this number had grown to 7.1 million. In light of this significant growth and skepticism about quality, there have been calls for greater oversight of this format of educational delivery. Accrediting bodies tasked with this oversight have developed guidelines and standards for online education. There is a lack of empirical studies that examine the relationship between accrediting standards and student success. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the presence of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on College (SACSCOC) standards for online education in online courses, (a) student support services and (b) curriculum and instruction, and student success.

An original 24-item survey with an overall reliability coefficient of .94 was administered to students ($N=464$)

at Florida International University, enrolled in 24 university-wide undergraduate online courses during fall 2014, who rated the presence of these standards in their online courses. The general linear model was utilized to analyze the data. The results of the study indicated that the two standards, student support services and curriculum and instruction were both significantly and positively correlated with student success, but with small R^2 and strengths of association less than .35 and .20, respectively. Mixed results were produced from chi-square tests for differences in student success between higher and lower rated online courses when controlling for various covariates, such as discipline, gender, race/ethnicity, GPA, age, and number of online courses previously taken. A multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the curriculum and instruction standard was the only variable that accounted for a significant amount of unique variance in student success. Another regression test revealed that no significant interaction effect exists between the two SACSCOC standards and GPA in predicting student success.

The results of this study are useful for administrators, faculty, and researchers who are interested in accreditation standards for online education and how these standards relate to student success.

Implications for Practice

One of the key principles of accountability in accreditation acknowledged by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is “a strong institution-accreditor relationship is central to assure that institutions, in carrying out their academic leadership responsibilities, are appropriately scrutinized with regard to achieving their goals” (CHEA, 2011, p.1). The principal-agent theory, interwoven within CHEA’s accountability principle of goal scrutiny, postulates that oversight power or oversight mechanisms are set up by the principal to ensure that its goals are being carried out by the agent. In the context of this study, the oversight mechanisms used by SACSCOC are the accrediting standards prescribed by SACSCOC for institutions offering distance education.

Although the application of quality assurance procedures and accreditation standards to online education is still in its inchoate stages (Latchem & Jung, 2012), the proliferation of online education and projections of further increase suggest that online education will remain a permanent and viable feature of the higher education landscape. Therefore, establishing systems that the delivery of online education meets acceptable definitions and norms of quality is of paramount importance for institutions and accreditors.

The significance of accrediting standards for online education becomes even more relevant when taking into consideration that the majority of chief academic officers at colleges and university acknowledged “that regional and specialized accreditation standards and expectations were the main drivers of outcome assessment initiatives on their campuses” (Provezis, 2010, p.5). If institutions’ outcome assessment systems are driven largely by accreditation standards, then it is important that the standards being used have a well-defined association with student learning and program outcomes.

A Basic Interpretive Study of the Experiences of University Students Who Have Dropped or Failed an Online Course

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Abstract

Online courses have increased in enrollments over the past few decades. As the number of students taking online courses have increased, so has the number of students who have dropped or failed an online course. According to the literature, online courses may have higher drop rates than traditional, face-to-face courses. The number of students who fail an online course is, also, of concern. As online courses may continue to grow over the next few decades, studies on persistence in online courses may benefit students, administrators, instructional designers, educators, and researchers. Although previous research studies have addressed persistence in online courses, very few examine it from the perspectives of students who were unsuccessful in their courses. These students may have unique insights about the online experience that may have related to their lack of success. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of university students who have failed or dropped an online course through the lenses of transactional distance theory and Kember’s model of dropout in distance education. Transactional distance theory discusses the dialog, structure, and learner autonomy involved in an online course, while, Kember’s model presents categories that may relate to dropping an online course. Together, the theory and model may help in understanding the experiences of students who have dropped or failed an online course.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants from a large Southeastern university in the United States. Based on the partici-

pants' responses, the data was sorted and ranked according to the amount of transactional distance in their courses, as well as the categories of Kember's model. Many of the participants who experienced low or high transactional distance have, also, expressed an issue with the goal commitment category of Kember's model. Additionally, there were important differences in the student characteristics of those who dropped or failed an online course. Furthermore, suggestions for improving online courses were given by the participants. Some of these suggestions included more student-instructor interactions, the use of more technology tools in their online course, and for orientations to the online environment to be offered.

Implications for Practice

Transactional distance theory and Kember's (1989) model helped to explain the experiences of the participants in this study who have dropped or failed an online course. These experiences and the suggestions that the participants provided may help to improve online courses. Lee and Choi (2011), also, commented on how to improve online courses. From the responses, many of the participants wanted timely instructor responses, the use of multimedia-enriched tools, and one wanted to not feel isolated online. Nistor and Neubauer (2010) stated that few researchers go beyond counting the number of students who drop and relating that to those who completed their online course.

Suggestions for improving the quality and experience in online courses from participants of this study include weekly video interactions with the instructor, chunking information and releasing it over time, and having assignments due during the week instead of the weekends. Additionally, an orientation could be given for credit at the beginning of the course to help new online students acclimate to the environment, and a certificate of completion would be given at the end of each module as a reward system to spur motivation.

Online courses may proliferate even further over the next few years. If enrollments in online courses increase more over time, then, it is important for researchers to understand the experiences of those who were unsuccessful in an online course. This way, the body of literature on persistence in online courses may provide educators, administrators, instructional designers, and students with the best practices for promoting a successful and optimal online experience.

English Language Learners: A Correlational Study of the Relationship Between a Proficiency Level Assessment and End of Course Test Scores at One Georgia High School

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Abstract

Understanding the language of one's cultural environment is important for effective communication and function. As such, students entering U.S. schools from foreign countries are given access to English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs and they are referred to as English Language Learner (ELL) students. This dissertation examined the correlation of ELL ACCESS Composite Performance Level (CPL) score to the End of Course tests (EOCTs) and the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGTs) in the four content courses (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies). A premise of this study was that English language proficiency is critical in meeting or exceeding state and county assessment standards.

A quantitative descriptive research design was conducted using cross-sectional archival data from a secondary source. There were 148 participants from school years 2011-2012 to 2013-2014 from Grades 9-12. A Pearson product moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between the ACCESS CPL (independent variable) and the EOCT scores and the GHSGT scores (dependent variables).

The findings showed that there was a positive correlation between ACCESS CPL scores and the EOCT scores where language arts showed a strong positive correlation and mathematics showed a positive weak correlation. In addition, there was a positive correlation between ACCESS CPL scores and GHSGT scores where language arts showed a weak positive correlation.

The results of this study indicated that there is a relationship between the stated variables, ACCESS CPL, EOCT and GHSGT. Moreover, the results of this study showed that there were positive correlations at varying degrees for each grade levels.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research could serve to affect change in policies and practices for the ELL students in Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS). Additionally, the manner in which ELL students in GCPS are prepared to take the culminating assessments in the four

content areas which ultimately determines how many of them, after four years, are successful at earning a high school diploma should be revisited.

Using the information examined in this study, it may be possible to identify the point it appears the ELLs are able to succeed in passing EOCT courses and post a “meets” score on the GHSGTs. In addition, are there variables other than proficiency in English that can explain the lack of progress for the ELLs who are unsuccessful at passing the EOCT tests and courses and the GHSGT assessments. Another area of concern is whether or not the ELL students in GCPS are making consistent progress in their Composite Proficiency Levels. If they are not, are there any patterns emerging that can help administrators to determine the factors that are preventing these students from becoming proficient English speakers so that they can exit the ELL program? In addition, it would also be useful to identify what factors seem to be contributing to their success so that those factors can be replicated. Administrators may also need to consider that ELLs need additional support to help them succeed in these courses and improve passing rates in EOCT courses and on the tests themselves.

Undergraduate Students’ Perceptions of Study Abroad and Their Level of Achievement of Global Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

This study expanded on current research on study abroad and global learning, using the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), and conducted at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, FL. The GPI assesses the holistic development of a global perspective in higher education within three domains and their respective FIU-determined equivalents: cognitive (global awareness), intrapersonal (global perspective), and interpersonal (global engagement). The main purpose of this study was to assess FIU’s undergraduate students’ perceptions of study abroad on their level of achievement of global awareness, global perspective, and global engagement. The secondary purpose was to determine how the students described their study abroad experience and achievement of global learning.

The research design for this study consisted of parallel mixed methods. The quantitative component was an ex

post facto with hypothesis design, using a pretest/post-test nonequivalent group methodology. FIU undergraduates ($N=147$) who studied abroad for one semester or more completed the GPI pre- and post-tests. Descriptive statistics and paired t -tests were conducted to compare the means. The interviews included 10 students, and were analyzed through Structural coding, Saldaña’s In Vivo coding, and Value coding.

Quantitative analyses indicated positive changes in the students’ global awareness and global perspective. These analyses also showed that the FIU students achieved higher post-test means on all the domains of the GPI compared to other studies. Qualitative analyses showed that the students’ experiences incorporated all three global learning outcomes, most notably global awareness and perspective.

Implications for Practice

The lessons learned from the current study lend themselves to various recommendations for practice. The first practical recommendation is for study abroad leaders to create learning environments whereby global learning outcomes, measures, activities, and programmatic improvements are integrated into the study abroad program from beginning to end. Study abroad staff members could work together with faculty starting in the planning stages to design experiences that will introduce students to the global learning outcomes. Appropriate assessments would be chosen or developed, assessment activities completed, assessment data analyzed, and appropriate adjustments made to continually improve the study abroad experience.

In addition to more deliberately connecting the study abroad experience to global learning outcomes, recommendations for course level strategies include linking activities and assignments to the global learning outcomes. For instance, assignments where students can work and collaborate with students from other universities nationwide and internationally may help increase their level of achievement in the interaction related learning outcomes where students scored low in the current study. For co-curricular activities, staff leading these efforts could offer opportunities for students to engage in service learning such as participating in local, regional, national, and international community service efforts. This effort can be enhanced by a collaboration between the OSA, the Office of Engagement, and the Center for Leadership and Service. Furthermore, tapping in to organizations such as the International Volunteer System may help increase students’ global learning outcomes related to responsibility, the area in which students scored the lowest in the current study.

Foreign Language Education in Colombia: A Qualitative Study of Escuela Nueva

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Abstract

Since 2004, the Colombian Ministry of Education has been implementing the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) with the goal of having bilingual high school graduates in English and Spanish by 2019. However, implementation of the PNB has been criticized by English Language Teaching (ELT) specialists in the country who say, among other things, that the PNB introduced a discourse associated exclusively with bilingualism in English and Spanish.

This study analyzed interviews with 15 participants of a public school of the Colombian Escuela Nueva, a successful model of community-based education that has begun a process of internationalization, regarding the participants' perceptions of foreign language education and the policies of the PNB. Six students, five teachers, and four administrators were each interviewed twice using semi-structured interviews. To offer a critique of the PNB, this study tried to determine to what extent the school implemented the elements of Responsible ELT, a model developed by the researcher incorporating the concepts of hegemony of English, critical language-policy research, and resistance in ELT.

Findings included the following: (a) students and teachers saw English as the universal language, whereas most administrators saw English imposed due to political and economic reasons; (b) some teachers misinterpreted the 1994 General Law of Education mandating the teaching of a foreign language as a law mandating English; and (c) some teachers and administrators saw the PNB's adoption of competence standards based on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages as beneficial, whereas others saw it as arbitrary.

Conclusions derived from this study of this Escuela Nueva school were: (a) most participants found the goal of the PNB unrealistic; (b) most teachers and administrators saw the policies of the PNB as top-down policies without assessment or continuity; and (c) teachers and administrators mentioned a disarticulation between elementary and high school ELT policies that may be discouraging students in public schools from learning English. Thus, this study suggests that the policies of the PNB may be contributing to English becoming a gatekeeper for higher education and employment,

thereby becoming a tool for sustaining inequality in Colombia.

Implications for Practice

The idea that general education teachers can be trained to teach English does not seem to help students on their process of learning a foreign language. As it has been pointed out many times by participants in this study, students are demotivated to learn English in elementary school because their English teachers are general education teachers who were forced to teach English. On the other hand, once students enter high school and are taught by foreign language majors, they are shocked: students were not used to having their lessons taught in English and they feel that suddenly too much is asked of them. If schools are to offer foreign language learning choices, there should be a good supply of foreign language majors to teach in elementary school. What is happening now is that schools are sent only English teachers and students in schools do not have other choices of foreign languages to learn.

The process of developing foreign language policy could be more localized and dictated by regional or contextual specificities. The Colombian educational system allows for a decentralized, bottom-up approach in terms of foreign language education policy. Decentralizing the development of foreign language education policy does not necessarily mean that there is not a unified approach in foreign language education in the country.

To avoid the shocks that may result from having very easy foreign language lessons in elementary taught by non-specialists and very difficult lessons in high school taught by specialists, and the constant disparity in the level of foreign language proficiency of students in different schools, there should be a well-articulated national curriculum that progresses smoothly from the elementary years through the high school years and that is in place in any school in the country. Schools could find ways to make the teaching of a foreign language "transversal" to other academic subjects the way it is being implemented at the Octavio Calderón and practicing teachers could aid foreign language teachers in elementary schools the way it is being implemented at the Octavio Calderón.