

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Education apps and learning outcomes examined in new research

The use of education-marketed apps and their effectiveness on actual learning outcomes has captured the attention of a University of Tasmania researcher.

Faculty of Education PhD candidate Michelle Somerton has looked at the educational effectiveness and benefits of mobile technologies as part of her thesis, which investigates reading comprehension difficulties and the delivery of teaching strategies in mobile technology platforms.

“Since the introduction of specific software for mobile technologies, in particular apps, evidence is scarce regarding the effectiveness of these products in providing educational outcomes,” she said.

“While there is a large amount of anecdotal and observational evidence surrounding motivation and engagement, there is little data which suggests measurable learning benefits.

“There are many teacher accounts which describe higher levels of student motivation and engagement, but the question is, are they learning?”

Ms Somerton said many of the apps marketed towards education are created using game-engine templates, not written for a specific educational outcome in the way a professional educator may deliver appropriate learning content.

“Therefore there is a focus on gaming techniques, like moving through levels, as opposed to education approaches of creating and exploring,” she said.

Ms Somerton will travel to Atlanta on Thursday to present her study findings at the ISTE Conference and Expo.

She is one of 50 researchers from around the world attending the event which aims to facilitate the exchange of ideas and discussion in the field of education technology.

It attracts more than 18,000 attendees and industry representatives.

As part of her study, Ms Somerton has undertaken a pilot study which involved the design and development of an app “Billy Possum’s Interactive Comprehension”.

The app is still being trialled in Australia, and is due to be launched in August this year.

University of Tasmania
Private Bag 95
Hobart TAS 7001
T 03 6226 2999
media.office@utas.edu.au

utas.edu.au

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