

Promoting Academic Literacy among Arabic Speaking Seventh Graders: Is Technology Really Better?

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Abstract

The study examined the efficacy interventions promoting literacy in Arabic-native-speaking seventh graders, a group which is at literacy risk from both systemic-organizational hardships (i.e, less funding, low SES) and from the complex structure of the Arabic language. The study focused on Diglossia, the difference between the written and spoken forms of the language. 92 students were assigned to three groups: an intervention program via a printed learning platform (N=36), an intervention program via a computerized learning platform (N=30), and a control group (N=26). Receptive, productive and application in context vocabulary tests, and a reading comprehension test, were administered before and after the interventions. Prior to interventions, students were assessed for Arabic diglossic context awareness. Results showed that compared to the control group, both intervention groups achieved higher improvements in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. However, no significant differences were found between the printed and computerized learning platforms. Awareness of Arabic diglossic context predicted 26% of pupils' performance on the application in context pre-test, 18% of their performance on the receptive vocabulary pre-test and 10.4% of their performance on the reading comprehension test. Results point to the need for interventions promoting academic literacy in middle schoolers who speak Arabic as L1. The absence of additional technological value suggests that literacy can and should be promoted even in environments lacking the funding and resources for technological advancements. The importance of awareness of the Arabic diglossia is highlighted in context of intervention and educational policies.

Keywords: Arabic, intervention, literacy, middle school, technology