

Stakeholder Summary

Tablet Devices a Useful Tool for Teaching Writing Skills

Using tablet devices as a classroom tool allows for immediate instructor feedback and easier student collaboration, according to a new study published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). And when used in a college developmental writing course, they improved attendance, participation and performance.

Project Description

The Impact on Writing Skills of Tablets in College Developmental English Classes examined the impact of tablet devices in a non-credit developmental writing course at Seneca College for students who needed additional written English training. Using a software package called DyKnow, students could submit written projects, collaborate with instructors or classmates and have their work anonymously shown to the class for discussion. More than 250 students were enrolled in and completed the class over three semesters in 2011 and 2012. Half were placed in a program with tablet devices and the other half participated without any additional technology. The study used data on attendance and grades as well as a faculty survey. A voluntary student survey component was conducted, but as less than 10% responded the results cannot be considered statistically significant.

Findings

Over the three semesters, students using tablet devices had grades nearly 3% higher than their counterparts and attended 4% more classes. The authors say that while these might seem like small differences, they suggest the need for further research into this technology as a teaching tool. They note that the continued evolution of software capabilities may also have an impact on the effectiveness of these devices.

Faculty teaching the course said that the devices were valuable for demonstrating exemplary student work and helping to set standards for student achievement. They also cited the devices' value for one-on-one tutorials and note taking. While the results were not statistically significant, the student survey did yield some interesting observations. All respondents reported that having tablets in class improved their learning experience compared to other English courses, with one student commenting "It made me want to attend an English class more."

The study cautions that it is difficult for any single teaching intervention to transform student performance and engagement on its own. Ultimately student success requires multiple methods including technology, learning communities, increased student-faculty interaction and increased counseling, which is consistent with previous HEQCO research including the 2011 report [Defining, Measuring and Achieving "Student Success" in Ontario Colleges and Universities.](#)

The Impact on Writing Skills of Tablets in College Developmental English Classes was prepared by Andrew Schmitz and Irene Kanurkas from Seneca College.