

Honors Capstone: Written Critique

Bethany Gooding

My honors capstone project, "Evaluating Grades K-12 Literacy Development in the Digital Age," focused on researching how digital reading has influenced grades K-12 students in evaluating its impacts in the digital age. I worked with my capstone mentor, Dr. Daniel Woods, who helped me find research related to my topic, as it's also his discipline. I reviewed existing research and found that there are different online or electronic reading mediums, like phones, laptops, computers, etc., along with types of reading, such as academic or recreational. I found that in studies using digital reading within the classroom, either in instruction or from an educational program, it benefits students further with teacher scaffolding in assisting the student with answering questions about the text or teaching them how to use digital tools within the digital reading. I found that digital reading can be beneficial for students with disabilities. Still, studies found that digital tools created to help students, like hyperlinks, which are links to different online websites that can be used to define vocabulary words or have educational videos, or the lack of paratextual cues in digital texts that print books, such as chapter numbers or page numbers can hinder students' performance and comprehension of a text.

I connected my research to the current online administration of Virginia's standards of learning assessments, such as reading, as several studies I reviewed indicated that students with prior digital skills tend to perform better in reading comprehension, at times suggesting a lack of teacher scaffolding as a limitation for the study. The standards of learning reading assessment include different digital tools that require students to be previously scaffolded by teachers in learning how to use it before they take the test. In linking my research and the state requirement that the assessments be administered online, apart from students with individualized education

plans, as they can take the assessment adapted in a different medium, such as paper, I believe that students with prior digital skills will have increased test scores. However, a digital divide in education occurs when school districts don't have the funding to provide technological devices, such as personal laptops, for educational purposes. I also noted in my capstone project that students may not have internet access at home or electronic devices to improve their digital skills. Further research should investigate the digital divide in education by comparing districts that provide electronic devices for students to districts that don't in assessment scoring. I also believe that digital reading programs or electronic reading formats should have more adaptive or accessible programs with digital tools as a goal to benefit students with disabilities further in increasing their reading comprehension skills by also taking into consideration the limitations of previous studies.

I furthered my capstone research in my senior thesis paper, "Benefiting Struggling Readers in the English Language Arts Classroom through Digital Reading & Tools," which focuses on assistive online resources for struggling student readers in school districts that can provide electronic devices to students for educational uses. In my thesis paper, I also discuss Artificial Intelligence's onset for educators and students, as it's been included as a Virginia standard of learning objective for middle school students in the ethics of research and digital learning. My paper discusses how it can produce more individualized student assignments based on their reading level. As a future educator, I believe this topic is essential to research as new technology continuously develops. Students are more likely to own technology at some point in their adult life, which requires schools to consider involving a curriculum that focuses on digital or media literacy skills so that students can have a foundational understanding of the digital age.