Chapter 10

M–Learning Apps for Film Studies: An Approach Towards Self-Determined Learning

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ABSTRACT

While there are many educational apps for traditionally taught subjects such as mathematics and science, more specialized curriculum has largely been left unexplored in terms of m-learning. Film studies, an academic discipline that deals with the theoretical, historical, and critical underpinnings of film, is one such subject that has very few mobile applications. This chapter explores creating a mobile application to teach basic approaches to film interpretation and in addition, considers a heutagogical approach in design. Benefits of m-learning include increased delivery options for multimedia, context-based learning support, and the prospects of a more fulfilling learning experience. This chapter provides direction for implementation and evaluation techniques for an introductory film studies module on film noir, which can be integrated into a mobile format to make film theory more relevant and accessible.

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As a result of the rapid growth of educational technology, many apps now exist for core subjects like mathematics (math) and science, yet less traditional subjects (media studies and film studies, to name a few) have largely been left unexplored in the field of mobile learning, otherwise known as M-Learning. Interestingly, literacy, despite being a core skill to modern society, is also considerably under-represented. A study on educational apps at Apple’s App Store revealed that early learning and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) apps are popular, while literacy and art/creativity apps are sparse (Shuler, 2012). Shuler says that this presents an opportunity for developers to fill the gap in the market. The study likely considered literacy based on core reading and writing skills, hence it alludes to an even greater lack of the aforementioned less traditional disciplines related to the literacy umbrella, which may not even be categorically represented in the study. Furthermore, the Shuler study also reported that 80% of apps target children and found that while the percentage of apps made for children were increasing, apps for adults have been in decline. Taken together, there exists a notable absence in apps geared towards less traditional subjects and adult learners. What follows is a preliminary investigation of these gaps in the M-Learning community. In order to examine the potential of M-Learning outside of traditional domains, we will investigate how it might be applied to teaching film studies. Emphasis will be given to demonstrating how M-Learning contributes to the pedagogy of the contents and skills connected to film analysis.

One of the key considerations of this paper is how a heutagogical approach can be integrated into mobile education for film learners. Heutagogy is the “study of self-determined learning” (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). To further clarify, Mulrennan (2018) says “Heutagogy is a net-centric teaching method in which learners are highly autonomous and self-determined.” In regard to the app proposed in this paper for film learning, this may mean that students are not only learning to identify film tropes, meanings and genre classifications through a mobile application, but also reflecting on why such classifications exist. Students may come up with their own assessments and content within the application. To make this inquiry more manageable, we will first explore the ways in which an introductory module for film studies, specifically Film Noir, could be designed and integrated into a mobile format. However, it should be known that film studies are but one of countless disciplines and Film Noir merely serves as a sample genre. The app, more broadly, would teach basic approaches to film interpretation, and our central aim is to incorporate M-Learning affordances in order to render film studies more relevant and accessible. This feat could conceivably be achieved for any discipline. A secondary objective of this investigation presents film studies as a necessary part of reflective media studies skills.
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