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Choosing and Using High-Quality Reading Apps with Primary Children

Here are some tips and strategies to support your child's learning as well as their interaction with the app.

LEARNING TIPS

Areas to introduce*:*
Learning objectives point these out to ensure your child is aware of what they are working on.
Success criteria ask your child if they are aware of their goal and highlight any on-screen indicators e.g. score, stars.
Outcome feedback (i.e. correct or incorrect) explain feedback if it is too subtle/abstract.

Areas for support:
Reading instruction if reading skill/concept is not included within the app, precede with revision activity or integrate into related home-school lesson.
Try again strategies provide strategies (e.g. stop/think, read aloud options in sentence, listen to feedback) to discourage your child from randomly tapping answers when they have unlimited attempts.
Elaborative feedback (i.e. process/strategies to reach correct answer) expand on (often limited) feedback given in app by attempting to diagnose error from chosen option/providing strategies to reach correct answer e.g. use phonics knowledge to sound out word.

USABILITY TIPS

Advance checks:
App design team look for info on app website to see who designed the app as an indicator of quality e.g. app/game designers, education experts, teachers, children.
Interaction and settings ensure doesn't require potentially difficult interactions, e.g. drag + position, tap + hold; use customisation settings to ensure text is readable for your child.
Fun vs usability evaluate if challenge at right level within games as well as appropriate balance of gameplay and learning. For longer term engagement look for games rather than 'gamified' apps.

Support strategies:
Verify understanding of instructions check your child understands task instruction e.g. do they know where to drag a correct answer?
Support for secondary skills provide support for skills not related to reading objective e.g. memory, counting, colours.
Model complex mechanics many apps will have some usability issues, model particular aspects before your child tries to prevent frustrations.

Useful links and further reading

- Hungry Little Minds FEED test for choosing an app**:**
https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/#information
- Can video games really help children learn? https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zfnymfr
- How do you know if a reading app is any good? (TES article):
https://www.tes.com/news/how-do-you-know-if-reading-app-any-good

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A glossary of common reading-related vocabulary that children are introduced to.

Grapheme A letter or number of letters that represent a sound (phoneme) in a word. It is the letter or letters that spell a sound in a word e.g th r ough . The sound /oo/ is represented by 'ough'.

Phoneme Smallest unit of speech distinguishing one word (or word element) from another e.g. 'p' in 'tap' differentiates it from 'tab', 'tan' etc.

GPC (Grapheme-phoneme correspondence) the relationships between the sounds (or phonemes) and letters (or graphemes). Knowledge of GPC means knowing the sound /t/ is represented by the letter 't'. It also requires knowledge that the sound /s/ can be represented by more than one letter 's' as in soft or c as in city.

High Frequency or Sight Words Commonly used words that young children are encouraged to memorise as a whole by sight, so that they can automatically recognise these words in print without having to use any strategies to decode.

Phonology Study of sound patterns that occur within languages. An inventory of sounds and their features, the roles which specify how sounds interact with each other.

Blending Involves looking at a written word, then at each grapheme and using GPC knowledge to work out which phoneme each grapheme represents and then merging these phonemes together to make a word. The basis of reading.

Segmenting This involves hearing a word, splitting it up into the phonemes that make it, using knowledge of GPCs to work out which graphemes represent those phonemes and then writing those graphemes down in the right order. The basis of spelling.

Root or Stem A basic word that does not have a prefix or suffix added.

Prefix A word part that can be added to the start of a root/stem word to change its meaning e.g. 'un'.

Suffix A word part that can be added to the end of a root/stem word to change its meaning e.g. 'ing'.

Digraph A grapheme containing two letters that makes just one sound (phoneme).

Trigraph A grapheme containing three letters that makes just one sound (phoneme).

Useful links and further reading

- National Curriculum Glossary for English:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/244216/English_Glossary.pdf
- iRead Project open access research papers: https://iread-project.eu/iread-publications/

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