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PERSONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: USING SymbalooEDU IN LEARNING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Abstract

Social and technological changes over the last 25 years mean that teachers are now faced with the challenge of utilizing technology to support their student's digital literacy development. This article reports on how the online curation software platform SymbalooEDU was used to support undergraduate and postgraduate learners of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The pedagogical theories behind personal learning environments (PLEs) are reviewed and then considered in the interpretation of data from two student surveys – a needs analysis of student's E-learning preferences, and a feedback survey about student perceptions and experiences of using SymbalooEDU to support their academic English learning. The results indicate that the students found the software beneficial for learning EAP but that the use of social learning was restricted by the way in which instructors set up and administered the social media in their courses. Educators need to be cognizant of the role they play in helping EAP learners develop their PLEs. Crucially, social media use in PLEs is not an activity whereby educators simply let the students take center stage. Its use has to be appropriately scaffolded and modelled to enable students to engage in meaningful peer mentoring, learning and teaching.

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