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The role of textbooks and other teaching and learning resources in higher education in Australia: change and continuity in supporting learning

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of textbooks and online learning resources in university study. In a large scale Australian research project the course coordinators and lecturing staff of twelve university courses were interviewed to elicit data on the resources that are prescribed to support student learning, the role of textbooks in teaching and learning; resource shifts between online and paper based resources; and the links between assessment and learning resources. The paper also reports on the student perspective of similar issues from students involved in sample of twelve undergraduate university courses.

The research presented here reveals that textbooks produced by commercial publishers were recommended in every university course. Furthermore the use of these textbooks reflects a typology of integration into the learning design of the course to support student learning. The research found that a resource shift to the sole recommendation of online resources was not occurring, and that the provision of these online and digital resources was complementary and designed to support traditional learning resources.

Regarding student use of learning resources, the research concluded that students indicated that they are time-poor and as a consequence, their capacity to engage fully with all learning resources recommended by course coordinators and tutors is limited. Although students did listen to the messages about learning resources conveyed by their tutors, their motivation was driven by the demands of their course assessment and as a result, students prioritised their focus on specific resources. The resources at the top of the priority list related specifically to successful completion of assessment tasks.

Key words: Higher education, textbooks, e-learning, teaching and learning resources, typology on integration, assessment in higher education