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Rebekah E. Wright

*Nova Southeastern University*, [rw1061@mynsu.nova.edu](mailto:rw1061@mynsu.nova.edu)

Jennifer L. Reeves

*Nova Southeastern University*, [jennreev@nova.edu](mailto:jennreev@nova.edu)

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# Open Educational Resource (OER) Adoption in Higher Education: Examining Institutional Perspectives

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The material in this article is derived from Rebekah Wright's doctoral dissertation. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Introduction

The costs associated with education, including tuition and learning resources, continue to rise causing affordability issues for learners. It has been reported that the cost of traditional textbooks and materials has risen by as much as 103% over the past decade (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Due to this increase, many students have opted out of purchasing required textbooks for classes. A study conducted in Florida found that 67% of students did not purchase required textbooks (Florida Virtual Campus, 2016). Institutions of Higher Education are becoming increasingly concerned with textbook affordability and the impact on academic performance, achievement, and completion (Jhangiani, Dastur, LeGrand, & Penner, 2018). These institutions have begun delving deeper into the issues associated with textbook affordability and seeking ways to reverse the negative effects experienced by learners due to rising textbook costs.

The implementation of open educational resources (OER) may be the solution, however, the impact of these resources is still undefined. OERs are being examined as cost-effective substitutions to traditional textbooks and literature suggests that OERs are equally effective and are comparable in quality to traditional textbooks (Hilton, n.d.). Current literature recommends further exploration concerning stakeholder perspectives of OER adoption and integration as well as examining the impact of OERs across educational institutions globally. A case study conducted at a state college in Florida sought to examine the perspectives of a group of four identified stakeholder groups (i.e., faculty, librarians, instructional designers, and students) in order to better understand the impact of these OERs at the institutional level (Wright, 2018).

## OERs

OERs are being explored by institutions of higher education as cost effective and easily accessible educational materials that could have the potential to replace expensive textbooks. OERs are defined as,

teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007, p. 4)

OERs are beginning to have a huge impact on teaching and learning, and they are changing the educational landscape by providing alternative methods for the delivery of educational content. OERs have many benefits, including cost savings, but they can also be complex making them somewhat difficult to adopt and integrate. To realize the true benefit of OERs, they must be adopted and integrated throughout the educational system by multiple stakeholders. In addition, the perspectives of various stakeholders provide detailed insights on the use of these resources in the classroom, their adoption and integration into the educational curriculum, and their overall impact on measures of student success (Avci, Ring, & Mitchell, 2015).

A state college in Florida has developed an OER initiative encouraging faculty to adopt and integrate OERs into their curriculum. The faculty work with instructional designers and librarians to locate, select, and implement the OERs. The initiative is in its third year and the rate of adoption by faculty has been slower than anticipated. Stakeholder perspectives were examined and analyzed to better understand the adoption process and the adoption rate of OERs at the institution (Wright, 2018).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative embedded single-case study design was used to examine the perspectives of institutional stakeholders at a state college in Florida. In this study, interviews were conducted with the following populations: (a) faculty who taught one or more OER-inclusive courses during the Spring 2018 semester, (b) librarians who taught with OERs or supported institutional adoption and integration of OERs, and (c) instructional designers who designed courses with the inclusion of OER materials. Additionally, a survey was distributed to students who were enrolled in one or more OER-inclusive courses during the Spring 2018 semester at the institution. The instruments used in this study were reviewed and approved by a panel of experts as well as pilot tested to establish content validity (Wright, 2018).

For the purpose of this case study, a purposeful maximal variation sampling technique was utilized in order to examine the various viewpoints of the selected participant groups. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with institutional faculty, librarians, and instructional designers. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from 132 students at the institution. The data extracted and analyzed from this study may provide recommendations to help increase the rate of OER adoption and increase awareness for other stakeholders who are looking to adopt OERs in the upcoming academic year.

The data collected for this study was analyzed using Saldana's (2016) qualitative data coding recommendations. The coding process began with two reading reviews of the faculty interview transcripts. The transcripts were highlighted, and data was coded within the margins, using in vivo coding, during the second review. The remaining interview transcripts were organized, coded, and analyzed using Quirkos, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software. Using a structural coding process, emerging themes were created from the codes extracted during the first coding phase. Focus coding was used as a second-cycle process to reorganize and merge existing themes. The results were then integrated into rich descriptions of the participant's experiences.

### **Stakeholder Perspectives**

Institutional stakeholders have been identified as having a significant influence on the adoption and implementation of a concept, idea, or innovation within a system (Avci et al., 2015). Examining these roles from an institutional standpoint, it is suggested that stakeholders provide valuable insights concerning institutional activities as their perspectives may affect the overall decision-making process at the institution (Avci et al, 2015). In this study, the perspectives of institutional stakeholders on OERs at a state college in Florida were explored and documented to better understand the adoption, integration, and utilization practices with these resources. Institutional stakeholders were identified as faculty, instructional designers, librarians, and students. Interviews were conducted with 14 stakeholders regarding OER quality, complexity, benefits, barriers, time investment, advantages, challenges, and experiences. Additionally, 132 students responded to a Likert-type survey with open-ended questions regarding their experiences with OERs, OER quality, and the impact of OERs on learning and engagement (Wright, 2018).

### **Faculty Perspectives**

A total of seven faculty were interviewed on their perspectives of OER adoption and integration at the institution. Faculty identified a multitude of resources that were adopted and integrated into their curriculum, including websites, webpages, and documents, videos, podcasts, articles, case-studies, literature, modules, assessments, visuals, media, documentaries, digital grammar tools, mainstream media, and images. Faculty suggested that OER adoption and integration is a time-consuming and tedious process, however, the cost-savings for the students outweigh the barriers and challenges. Additional identified advantages of OERs were that the resources are easily accessible, affordable, of good quality, and allow for creativity and flexibility. Faculty noted that the time to locate, vet, and curate

the resources was substantial, however, by using scholarly resources and relying on the expertise of the librarians they were able to reduce the time required to adopt and integrate the materials into the curriculum (Wright, 2018).

### **Instructional Designer Perspectives**

A total of four instructional designers were interviewed on their perspectives of OER adoption and integration at the institution. The instructional designers noted that OERs are time consuming and require a lot of work. Additionally, they noted that OERs are challenging to integrate due to the designer's reliance on faculty as content experts. They also mentioned that sometimes the quality of the material can be low if the proper resources are not utilized. The designers also indicated that many times the links used to access the material are non-functional. This adds both time and work to the designers' schedules. Despite challenges, the designers noted that OERs are cost-effective, easily accessible, customizable, accurate, and current. The designers also mentioned that OER repositories are not as robust as desired and due to this, it is extremely important that adoption and integration efforts heavily rely on the expertise of institutional librarians (Wright, 2018).

### **Librarian Perspectives**

A total of three librarians were interviewed on their perspectives of OER adoption and integration at the institution, including how their roles as librarians played a part in the process. The librarians noted that the primary benefits of OERs were accessibility, adaptability, availability, and cost-effectiveness. The primary challenges and barriers noted by librarians were time, licensing and copyright, hosting platforms, lack of acceptance, and lack of awareness. The librarians mentioned that locating OERs was very time consuming and that many of the OER repositories were not substantial and robust enough to find the resources needed for the institution. Despite the challenges presented by OERs, the librarians recommended a wide-scale adoption and integration of OERs at the institution. In addition, they noted that building relationships with institutional librarians is the best way to find OERs and integrate them appropriately into courses (Wright, 2018).

### **Student Perspectives**

A total of 132 students responded to the online OER student survey. Approximately 66% of the students reported being enrolled in four or more courses during the Spring 2018 semester. Overall, 88.9% of students reported that they enjoy learning in environments that incorporate OERs. The students reported on engagement and

performance with OER materials. Overall, 81% of students reported that OERs made them feel more engaged with their learning and improved performance within their programs of study. The students also reported that OERs improved the quality of their learning (81%), added value to their courses (72%), and offered advantages (79.7%). In response to the quality of OERs, 61.8% of students reported that OERs were above average quality, while 35.8% rated them as average in quality.

The students also responded to questions about OERs compared to traditional textbooks. Overall, 68.7% of students reported that OERs are as good as traditional textbooks, 55.3% reported that OERs helped them to understand the course content better than a traditional textbook, and 47.6% reported that they learned more using OERs compared to traditional texts. Results indicated that overall, students viewed OERs as beneficial and advantageous. Many students also reported that they prefer learning with OERs and that they would recommend OER-integrated courses to their peers. Student responses to open-ended survey questions revealed that while OERs do have limitations and challenges, such as only being accessible during the term of the course, overall OERs provided a cost-effective solution to expensive textbooks. In addition, OERs were viewed as more engaging and better at providing varying perspectives than traditional textbooks (Wright, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

OERs are becoming increasingly popular as cost-effective substitutions to traditional textbooks. Their adoption and integration have been slow, however, as the impact of OERs on student learning has not been fully studied and is still uncertain. Current studies report that student performance may be increased with the use of OERs compared to traditional textbooks (Jhangiani & Jhangiani, 2017). In addition, increased levels of engagement, academic performance, completion, and persistence can be observed in learners who enroll in OER-inclusive courses (Pitt, 2015; Robinson, 2015). While these increases cannot be attributed solely to the inclusion of OERs, it is suggested that providing early access to free materials may impact a student's ability to persist through courses ultimately leading to increases in graduation rates (Robinson, 2015). This study examined the perspectives of faculty, instructional designers, librarians, and students as stakeholders at a state college in Florida. While the impact of OERs on academic achievement was not specifically studied, stakeholder perspectives provided a detailed description of these resources as they are adopted, integrated, and utilized by stakeholders at the state college. These perspectives are critical in understanding

not only the rate of OER adoption, but also whether OERs will become sustainable resources at the institution.

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