

## ECER 2014: The Past, the Present and Future of Educational Research in Europe

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### Open Educational Practices in Public Higher Education in Portugal

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## **Contribution**

The main objective of this PhD research is to identify and understand the education and research practices of teachers/researchers of public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Portugal, as well as the influence of recommendations, initiatives and public support in the development of open educational practices.

To contextualize the problem, the study involves three levels of analysis: i) macro level, in terms of guidelines on open education and open access, both at European and national levels, as well as the strategies aligned with these guidelines; ii) mezzo level, regarding public HEI in Portugal, characterizing their openness degree and support of open practices development; iii) micro level, focusing on the practices of teachers/researchers in their academic context, when playing the dual role in research and education.

The concept of Open Educational Practices (OEP) has its theoretical background in the movement of Open education and, more specifically, has developed from the movement of Open Educational Resources (OER). The definition and terminology regarding "open" and "openness" are identified by authors such as Anderson (2009), Santos (2012) and Weller (2012), among others. A possible definition of the relatively recent movement of the OER has been put forward by UNESCO (2002), OCDE (2007), Wiley (2007) and Downes (2011), among others, and it has evolved from a focus on technology to a focus on resources and its relevance, not only in terms of learning but also of research. By analyzing the main initiatives of the OER movement in the last decade, it becomes clear that there has been a growing concern with the strategies that promote the use of the resources within open practices, in order to improve the learning experiences (OPAL, 2011; Ehlers, 2011; Teixeira, 2012). The international and collaborative initiative OPAL is an example of that concern. In the context of this project, a matrix was created that allows both individuals and educational institutions to position themselves in a "trajectory of openness" (Ehlers, 2011). Based on more than 65 international case studies, the model of the OPAL project, with its dimensions and indicators, allows educators and institutions to plan a strategy development of Open Educational Practices.

The concept of open access is also part of a broader movement, directly connected to science and academic research work, whose aim is to promote the free and unrestricted access to scientific and academic literature, aiming at a higher impact of the scientific work produced by researchers and institutions, thus reinforcing the scientific communication system. The benefits of open access on the impact of scientific research has been a focus of several studies (Kurtz et al., 2005; Joseph, 2012, among others). There are several policy initiatives on Open access, among which the European Scientific Council guidelines, in 2007, and the Open Access Pilot project, launched by

the European Commission in 2008, in the context of the 7th Framework Program. The aim of these initiatives was to ensure that the results of all research funded by the European Union (EU) were made available to all EU citizens for free. In Portugal, Universidade do Minho, and in particular its Documentation Services have developed several projects concerning Open access, namely in the context of European projects such as *MedOANet*, *OpenAIRE* and *OpenAIREplus*. In fact, a research has been carried out in 2012, inquiring Portuguese researchers about their opinions, attitudes and practices regarding Open access (Rodrigues et al., 2013), whose results are very important for the present PhD research, when characterizing the research practices of faculty in Portugal.

## **Method**

To be consistent with the proposed objectives, the methodology of this PhD research will be mainly qualitative, with a mixed methodology approach, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques at different stages of the research. Authors such as Morais & Neves (2007) and Creswell (2003), among others, suggest that there are cases when it is an advantage to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques, as combining the two may provide a better understanding of the research problems. The current project will be conducted in three different stages, each with its own methodological approach, and each based on different research instruments. In the first stage we aim at identifying the recommendations, initiatives and support to projects by the European Commission and the Portuguese Government, mainly those targeting public Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Therefore, a documentary research will be carried out, with an analysis of all publicly available documents regarding open education and open access. In a second stage, data will be collected through a questionnaire survey, targeting institution representatives and teachers/researchers of all public HEI. The main dimensions and indicators will be based on the survey carried out by researchers in the previously mentioned OPAL project, concerning OER and OEP in Higher education and adult training institutions. The main objective of this questionnaire was to research the impact of OER and OEP in learning scenarios and educational institutions, as well as to analyse the decision makers' strategies in supporting OEP. The questionnaire of this PhD research will also contemplate the issue of open access and the practices of researchers in Portugal; thus, the main dimensions and indicators will be adapted from the aforementioned survey conducted in 2012 by the Documentation Services of Universidade do Minho. A third and final stage of data collection has the objective of achieving a deeper understanding of the data collected in the previous stage, by means of focus groups. Even though the focus groups can ideally only be structured after analysing the data obtained, we believe that heterogeneous groups, consisting of both

institutional representatives, as well as teachers/researchers will allow the different actors to exchange their different perspectives and enrich the discussion.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The revision of literature carried out so far has allowed us to see that there aren't many studies focusing on understanding Open Educational Practices, particularly within the framework of public guidelines and institutional context. Some Portuguese institutions such as Universidade Aberta, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Universidade de Lisboa have participated in international projects, but it is necessary to understand the current situation of the Portuguese institutions and their teachers/researchers in the movement of openness to knowledge. At the same time, since the functions performed by teachers of Higher Education Institutions also includes the component of research, it seems relevant to also analyse the openness of their practices in research. A deep understanding of those practices is one of the aims of this PhD research. Furthermore, we will also be able to understand the extent to which the existence (or the absence) of initiatives and guidelines, at a European, national or institutional level influence the degree of openness of those education and research practices.

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