

## 1 Seek and ye shall find! The lecturer as a user and curator of open educational resources



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**In many cases, lecturers are the ones who develop, share and reuse open educational resources, but how much reuse actually takes place by lecturers in higher education in the Netherlands? And, how do lecturers evaluate the quality and suitability of these resources? This article focuses on the current use by lecturers of open educational resources, and the support that is required to stimulate their further adoption.**

Over the years, much research has been carried out into barriers to the adoption of open educational resources (OER). Cox & Trotter (2017) developed the OER adoption pyramid to identify factors that affect the adoption of OER. This model shows that these obstacles can be categorised as infrastructure (including technical infrastructure), permission, awareness of OER, the ability to find and use OER, and access to relevant, high-quality resources. In the Netherlands, lecturers have sufficient access to infrastructure such as computers and the internet. As far as permission is concerned, institutions in the Netherlands generally support the use of OER, although lecturers are often unaware of the institution's policy in this area (Schuwer & Janssen, 2018). However, it is essential that lecturers are aware of OER and how they differ from other educational resources, which is often not yet the case (Baas, Admiraal & Van den Berg, 2019; Schuwer & Janssen, 2018). Lecturers are often uncertain of what exactly OER are and whether and how they can be used in their own teaching. This makes it more difficult for them to find suitable and high-quality resources, while the use of non-open resources (with or without adaptation) can result in copyright infringement. Awareness of OER is also essential for the reuse of OER; an aspect that is addressed in more detail in the contribution by Raj et al. (2021) to this theme edition. In this article, we consider the reuse process as formulated in the model by Clements & Pawlowski (2012). This model (Figure 1) defines five phases in the reuse of OER: search, evaluate, adapt, use and, possibly, share.



*Figure 1. OER reuse process (Clements & Pawlowski, 2012)*

We make use of this model to describe the results of recent research, with the aim to optimise support for lecturers in the first four phases.

## Search and evaluate

Searching for OER is no simple task. As a lecturer, you need to know where to look, while not all OER are easily recognisable as such, and it takes a lot of time to find exactly what you are looking for among all the resources that are available (Luo et al., 2019; Amiel, 2013). After all, a lot of OER are hidden in a jungle of repositories. Library staff can help lecturers find OER, for example by offering selections of relevant resources per discipline. Even so, it is ultimately the lecturer who determines the relevance of a particular resource. Several organisations and institutes have developed rubrics to help lecturers with this, addressing issues such as ‘Is the resource relevant to the specific teaching practice?’, and ‘What is the quality?’ What is the quality? Although these rubrics can be useful, most have not been tested empirically (Yuan & Recker, 2015). We therefore know little about how lecturers actually evaluate the quality and relevance of OER. This was therefore investigated in a recent study by Baas, Van der Rijst, Van den Berg & Admiraal (submitted). As the evaluation of quality is a subjective process, the following definition of quality was used: high-quality educational resources are *‘characterized by key characteristics which, from the lecturer’s point of view, have an essential significance and determine whether the aid will be included in the teaching process’* (Karolčík et al., 2017, p. 315). Lecturers working in the same discipline (e.g. communication) were asked to evaluate four different OER during a physical meeting. The lecturers were asked the following questions: ‘What is your first impression?’ and ‘Is the resource relevant to your teaching?’ The lecturers discussed their responses to these questions, after which they were asked to conclude by answering the question: ‘Would you recommend the resource to a colleague?’ The aim of the study was to obtain insight into the elements on which lecturers base their evaluation of the quality of OER. The aim was therefore not to develop a general quality model for OER.

The results show that lecturers discussed elements related to content, design, user-friendliness, engagement and readability. Table 1 categorises the various components according to these five elements. Note that this does not mean that all of the lecturers applied the same criteria, but that these are the elements that lecturers focused on when evaluating OER (either positively or negatively). The results also show that, by discussing these resources with their colleagues, lecturers’ awareness of OER increased, that they were more positive about OER, and that they acquired more insight into the practical aspects of reusing OER in their own teaching.

Element	Components
Content	Relevance, scope, relation to discipline, accuracy, structure
Design	Educational design, granularity, design, how information is presented, developer, when the resource was developed
User-friendliness	Layout, navigation possibilities, usability, ease of access, insight into student’s progress
Engagement	Exercises, videos, feedback on exercises, interaction, student can see progress
Readability	Language, language level, style, text length

Table 1. Components in the five elements named by lecturers in the discussions

## Adapt and use

We now know more about how lecturers evaluate OER, but this still says little about the actual use of these resources in their teaching. How much use do lecturers already make of OER in their teaching? And, how do lecturers use these resources? Do they adapt them or do they use them 'as is'? In a recent study, we asked lecturers in the Netherlands to complete a questionnaire to obtain more insight into this. As not all lecturers are familiar with the term 'open educational resources', we did not ask specifically about their use of OER, but asked in more general terms 1) which educational resources they use on a particular degree programme, and 2) where they obtain these resources from. The questionnaire was conducted among three groups: it was first sent to lecturers in nursing programmes, then to lecturers in ICT programmes at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, and finally to other higher education lecturers in the Netherlands. We also asked this last group about their knowledge of OER. If lecturers said that they were familiar with OER, we asked them how they use these resources, and why.

The results showed that lecturers obtain OER from different sources, depending on the type of resource. Resources that are difficult or time-consuming for lecturers to develop themselves (such as videos, textbooks and photographs) are usually obtained from third parties and are reused without first being adapted. Unsurprisingly, access to these resources is often unlimited, as they have been placed online by the author. Resources that need to be more context-specific or that concern specialised subjects are usually developed by the lecturers themselves. These are mainly presentations, assessments and exercises, and access to these resources is usually restricted to the institution. This is in line with the findings of Rolfe (2012), who stated that resources are more likely to be shared locally than through more formal means.

One striking result is that OER policy does not seem to encourage lecturers to reuse OER. This could be because the institution does not have such a policy in place, because lecturers are unaware of the policy, or because the policy does not motivate them to reuse OER. In an earlier study by Schuwer & Janssen (2018), lack of awareness of OER policy was found to be a barrier to the open sharing of educational resources.

As mentioned above, we also asked the lecturers in the last survey whether they were familiar with open licences. However, despite most lecturers being familiar with open licences, only one third of them checked the licence when reusing OER. So, although recent research by Seaman & Seaman (2020) suggests that familiarity with OER is increasing, this does not necessarily imply an increase in the correct reuse of OER. Whereas previous research indicated that the limited adoption of OER could be explained by a lack of awareness, these results show that – even if lecturers are aware of open licences – they do not necessarily check them before reuse. We can therefore conclude that lecturers perhaps make more use of OER than the figures would suggest. This conclusion reflects the findings of Beaven (2018), who states that most practices are 'hidden, and take place in private spaces' (p. 388). David Wiley also calls this hidden reuse the 'dark reuse' of OER (Wiley, 2009).

## Tips to encourage reuse per phase of the reuse process

Based on these findings, we present the following suggestions to encourage the reuse of OER:

### Search

- Libraries can often provide support for finding suitable resources and applications. Lecturers should therefore be made aware of this, if necessary. This support can also

include advice regarding licences and conditions for reuse (see the article by Moes & Kleijheeg (2021) in this theme edition).

#### Evaluate

- Invite lecturers to work together to evaluate OER. If they do this with colleagues from their own team, the discussions will not only focus on the educational context, but the reasoning of colleagues may change the perception that lecturers have of a certain resource.
- Such team discussions are particularly important when redesigning the curriculum. Lecturers indicated that they find it difficult to implement OER in ongoing degree programmes because the curriculum has already been set. By providing support from educational advisors and/or librarians during these discussions, any misconceptions or questions about OER can be addressed or answered straight away.

#### Adapt

- Emphasise the fact that it is possible to adapt OER. Often, lecturers are unsure whether and how OER can be adapted. What adaptations are needed to create resources that are *fit for purpose* for the local context? Make sure that there is sufficient attention and support for this.

#### Reuse

- As OER policy seems to have very little influence on the willingness of lecturers to reuse resources, activities to promote reuse should be implemented bottom-up. Of course, this must be done with the support described elsewhere in this article.
- Although it may be quicker and easier for lecturers to use educational resources without checking the licence, it is important to emphasise the consequences that this can have. Failure to check licenses not only disadvantages the author of the resource, but also increases the risk that the organisation Stichting PRO will bring a claim against the institution for the unauthorised use of copyrighted material.
- Talk about the reuse of resources in the department/institution. What is needed right now to make this possible? What kinds of resources are students interested in? What is their opinion, for example, of English-language educational resources?

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