

Open Educational Resources and Repositories: the Role of Quality

Towards a community-oriented Quality Review Framework for OER

**ENCORE+ OER Quality Circle
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European Network for Catalysing
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I Quality of OER as concern

The issue of **quality assurance** is fundamental in supporting the uptake of OER. Research has shown that it "remains a concern despite availability of many guides and frameworks" (2017 CoL Global Report, 62). This holds true for stakeholders in education as well as in business. This is why strategies are needed to further monitor the quality of OER and, most importantly, spread trust in OER amongst stakeholders. Results from the ENCORE+ OER Stakeholder Survey 2021 have shown that professional educators as well as leaders and managers in higher education and business rely on trustworthy source such as repositories in order to access high quality OER. Stakeholders from business and higher



Figure 1 Quality perception of OER, n(L/M)= 52, n(PE)= 156, 5 point scale with the first two points contracted. From OER Encore Survey 2021.

education were asked whether they prefer to use OER from official trustworthy sources (e.g. repositories), from personal recommendations (e.g. colleagues, friends), with official quality certifications, seals or stamps, or whether they assess OER based on their own evaluation and quality judgement (n=208). 75,6% of the professional educators

and 59,6% of the leaders and managers agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred to use OER from official trustworthy sources such as repositories.

One of the ideas behind OER is that it can be published in an "unfinished" state and be improved through collaboration. In an early ENCORE research work, our experts stated, that this can lead to problems when it comes to quality assurance. On the one hand, the user has to be able to distinguish between resources that are of high quality and ready to be used, and those resources that are still in this process of collaborative improvement and development. On the other hand, too rigorous quality assessment can stifle this collaborative process.

In the discourse on quality assurance, we can observe a move away from a focus on quality characteristics towards a new "quality community view". In ENCORE we will explore what it takes to set up a European collaboration for an open OER review community. In order to engage institutions, businesses, educational professionals and

learners into open review communities, “open quality frameworks” are needed as well as emerging technologies to support them, such as Artificial Intelligence.

In order to promote quality assurance, comprehensive strategies are necessary for monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of OER. Here it can help to take a look beyond Europe for successful examples of such strategies, such as BCcampus and eCampus in Canada and the Quality Assurance Review in Indonesia (2020 CDE OER Advocacy Committee Report, 22). Besides the questions of attitude and motivation, the ability and confidence to assess the quality of OER presents one of the key challenges in the uptake of OER. Allen and Seaman have found that “two key qualities faculty consider when selecting learning materials for their students are proven efficacy and trusted quality” (2014, cited in Hilton 2020, 854). It is therefore crucial to enable users to confidently select high-quality OER and thereby instill trust in these resources.

The aspect of quality serves as one example of the gap between having comparable organizational structures and awareness levels on the one side, and differing attitudes and quality preferences on the other side. Despite coming from a rather homogeneous OER-affine background, the respondents of our survey expressed vastly differing quality preferences and perceptions when asked for their preferred selection criteria for OER. Furthermore, the institutional policy - practice gap emerges here as well, with leaders and managers expressing differing views from professional educators on appropriate ways to select high quality OER.

II Summary of state of play for quality of OER in Europe

In 2011, the **OPAL project** (Open Educational Quality Initiative, <http://web.archive.org/web/20140327055249/http://www.oer-quality.org/>) developed the basic cornerstones for quality of open educational resources (OER). The approach argued that resources in themselves do not immediately lead to education quality but that rather the education process has to be taken into account while recognizing that the use of open educational resources changes an important component of the education setting. The initiative therefore developed the approach of open educational practices (OEP, see Ehlers 2011, 2014) which today is an accepted and well introduced concept expressing the use of open educational resources in educational settings characterized by the attempt to open the learning design. Quality in that regard means fostering open educational practice.

The initiative published important guidelines for learners, for education professionals, like teachers, trainers, curriculum designers or quality management professionals, for policy makers and for institutional leaders. For each of these stakeholder groups, a guideline was developed which provides a maturity matrix against which stakeholders can assess themselves and their ability for OEP capacity, meaning their ability to support quality in the open education process. You can find the full project report here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259597164_Beyond_OER_-_Shifting_Focus_to_Open_Educational_Practices_OPAL_Report_2011.



Figure 2. State of the art review of quality issues related to open educational resources (OER) by Camilleri, A. F., Ehlers, U.-D., Pawlowski, J., European Commission, Joint Research Centre, & Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, 2014.

In 2014, with the support of the Joint Research Center of the European Commission, the European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning compiled and released the so far most comprehensive report on quality for open education resources in Europe (Camilleri et al., *State of the art review of quality issues related to open educational resources (OER)* 2014). The report lists a number of quality approaches dedicatedly developed for OER, explains the importance and value of open educational practices, and concludes that more efforts need to be made

on a European scale to develop the concept of quality in an open education space.

Quality for OER, respectively quality for open education is viewed as the single most important factor determining the uptake of OER in institutions and training contexts.

However, the concept of OER and OER quality has gone through several development phases with different focus points in research, policy and practice since its introduction in 2001. During the 2000s up to 2010, a strong focus was put on **developing** open educational resources from a **resource centristic** point of view, meaning a focus on data, metadata, interoperability, media types, definitions, and repositories. The process of searching for OER was at the center of attention, more than the OER themselves and their quality. An analysis of the research, projects, and initiative environment shows that from 2010 to 2020, more importance has been put on strategies of institutions, policies, competencies and development of the capacity of **usage, and quality (for learning)**. Today, big data and artificial intelligence-based recommendation of learning materials is within reach. Within institutions and in the national environment of European member states, this is coming to the forefront and is becoming reality.

Now, the question of quality for open education, taking into account the concept of **OER and OEP**, is therefore gaining new momentum. Where its uptake through maturing national environments and institutional policy work is gaining traction, quality comes to the forefront again as a necessary condition for its success.

III The ENCORE Quality Initiative: Towards a community-oriented quality framework

The ENCORE+ initiative takes the issue of quality as a focal point to develop cornerstone aspects of a **European Ecosystem of OER Quality** within the next three years (2021-2024) and beyond. We strongly believe that today the OER quality debate has matured and that it is moving beyond questions of resource characteristics or ‘OER availability’ towards the quality of (open) educational processes. Furthermore, it is moving beyond ‘one size fits all approaches’ into individual, specific community-oriented frameworks. This has become possible since technology has matured as well, to be able to support community-oriented frameworks and to offer inclusive ways to work within communities. **The ENCORE+ initiative is therefore focusing on this new, yet to be developed, tested, and mainstreamed philosophy of “community-oriented quality approaches”.** We are convinced that each repository is a focal point for a user community and serves its user community as a stream of providing OER. We also believe that territories, and spaces of communities using OER exist within higher education institutions and businesses. Those are developing their own specific environments, using their own tools, deciding on their own regulations, and building and agreeing on their community specific values. We therefore think that it is important to add a new dimension to the current focus of quality development in OER, the dimension of **community-oriented value-based quality considerations**. ENCORE+ therefore invites OER repository representatives into a time-bound discussion, with the first event taking place on the **25th of October 2021**. This discussion is meant to lead into a short-term regular task force providing a forum for taking the next step in quality development in OER in Europe.

For the first so-called **Quality Circle meeting**, we will suggest to discuss the development of a new European OER review community. This community of OER repositories will share their quality considerations, be it implicit or explicit quality standards, quality approaches, evaluation mechanisms, recommendation mechanisms, and criteria lists. We’ll try to identify a reference list of aspects within the entire body of quality frameworks which can find a common agreement amongst all members and which then forms the initial body of a European OER quality reference framework. We will then work out an individual mechanism which allows repositories and institutions to calibrate the

framework for their own usage. This way, an individual version of this framework can be formed which is based on this European framework but in itself forms a specific quality approach for a specific purpose within a specific context. By doing this, we meet two goals. Firstly, we ensure that quality considerations are meaningful in the larger context of quality. Secondly, we ensure that the quality framework which is formed from the community discussion is meaningful for the individual institution and context.

IV Invitation to action

ENCORE+ responds to the priorities of opening up and modernising the European education and training sector through a coordinated European OER ecosystem. OER are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO). ENCORE+ will support uptake of OER through business and academia by taking a leading role in formulating the value propositions for OER usage for academia and the world of work and bringing both sectors together into a Knowledge Alliance.

ENCORE+ has identified that there is a distinct lack of an integrated European OER quality assurance mechanism (including credentialing) both in business and academia. The initiative will consolidate existing sectoral quality frameworks in order to build a European overarching consensus on quality for learning through OER and frameworks for professional development in this area.

We have started to develop the European open & community-led quality review, for OER creation or reflexion framework for OER and open education which will result in a consensus based and integrated European OER quality paradigm and assurance mechanism. To do so, we will identify the key quality concerns for future OER repositories, communities and users in OER creation, use and adaption.

The quality framework will consist of a tool which can be used by repository owners, by professionals (content creators, designers, etc.) and leaders in higher education and businesses and will comprise a quality charter for users. The tool will be constructed as an open and adaptable framework which serves to identify quality improvement potential. We will invite participants to mutually enter into community-based quality review processes.

We invite interested stakeholders, experts, educational professionals, researchers, policy makers, institutional leaders from the field of business and higher education to join the

ENCORE+ Quality Circle Meetings in order to jointly work for creating the quality framework for a European OER Ecosystem.

We invite all institutions holding and providing OER to join the discussion.

You can **sign up** for the first quality circle event here: <https://www.icde.org/encore-register-quality-circle>.

The event takes place on **October 25th, 2021** from **13:00-14:30 CEST**. It's free of charge.

We're very much looking forward to seeing you and we'll be happy to answer any questions beforehand. Feel free to contact Katharina Kunze (katharina.kunze@dhbw-karlsruhe.de).

Suggested Actions

- **Join** the ENCORE+ Circle for Quality
https://encoreproject.eu/event_listing_category/quality-circle/
- **Support** quality innovation through the exchange of stakeholder perspectives
- **Leverage** the adoption of quality frameworks for the realization of a (pan)European community-oriented quality framework
- **Share** perspectives and ideas for collaboration
- **Explore** innovative technology frameworks
- **Value**, share and promote examples of best practice

For further background information on quality issues related to OER, see:



JRC SCIENTIFIC AND POLICY REPORTS

State of the Art Review of Quality Issues related to Open Educational Resources (OER)

Anthony F. Camilleri
Ulf Daniel Ehlers
Jan Pawlowski

2014



Report EUR 26624 EN

Camilleri, A. F., Ehlers, U.-D., Pawlowski, J., European Commission, Joint Research Centre, & Institute for Prospective Technological Studies. (2014). State of the art review of quality issues related to open educational resources (OER). EUR-OP. <http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:LFNA26624:EN>

About ENCORE+

ENCORE+ responds to the priorities of opening up and modernising the European education and training sector through a coordinated European OER ecosystem. OER (open educational resources) are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO).

ENCORE+ brings together meaningful and focused human networks; technological solutions for sharing and discovering OER; policy reviews; quality criteria; and generating business models which draw on the affordances of OER to support innovation. ENCORE+ supports uptake of OER through business and academia by formulating value propositions for OER usage for education, training and business.

ENCORE+ directly addresses several European and international policy priorities:

- ***Stimulating innovation in businesses*** through learning and training innovation
- ***Reducing barriers to education*** affording learners the opportunity to up-skill or re-skill at a lower or nearly no cost, and in a flexible way
- ***Supporting the modernisation of higher education in Europe***, including digitalisation
- ***Bridging non-formal & formal education*** by advancing recognition of open learning

ENCORE+ Circles

ENCORE+ uses “Circles” to describe the key stakeholders who contribute to the European OER ecosystem of tomorrow. Our four Circles represent overlapping communities of practice: technology; policy/strategy; quality and innovation.

A total of 16 Circle events will be held over the lifetime of the project; these bring together stakeholders for consultation and networking. Events are free to attend! In 2023, a series of integration events will consolidate the Circles into one integrated and sustainable ENCORE+ community by integrating perspectives and best practice from across the Circles.

ENCORE+ is designed around five challenges which are addressed through the Circles.

Needs	ENCORE+ actions	Outcomes
Need 1: De-fragment the OER stakeholders community in Europe	Mapping the OER ecosystem and its stakeholders; modelling future scenarios; consultation exercises; whitepapers; integration events; guides for innovation; integration across education and training; entrepreneurialism; reporting.	ENCORE+ network, strengthening and connecting existing OER communities
Need 2: Strengthen collaboration and interoperability among European OER repositories	Providing a centralised hub for OER content; new paradigms for repository technologies (interfaces; implementations; protocols; content creation & re-use; networking) authenticated by the relevant communities to support best practice.	Integrated architecture of a European OER repositories infrastructure
Need 3: Support development of OER institutional strategies in European businesses and academia	Working with diverse stakeholder base to identify, synthesise and share strategies and business models across business and higher education.	European guidelines for developing effective OER strategies in business and academia
Need 4: Integrated European OER quality paradigm and assurance mechanisms	Identifying the key quality concerns for future OER repositories, communities and users; piloting a new quality framework focused on harnessing and enabling OER innovation.	European open & community-led Quality Review Framework for OER
Need 5: Entrepreneurial innovative approaches and business models based on OER	Supporting innovation through information exchange; appropriate software and services to enable pathways to innovation; understanding of the drivers of innovation; meaningful interactions between relevant stakeholders; providing a showcase for innovation.	European business and start-up community, empowered to innovate and improve operations by leveraging OER

Consortium Members

ENCORE+ brings together expertise from across academia, business and technology.

Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW)

DHBW is the largest university in Germany. It is a dual mode university in which students alternate between study and work partnerships from industry and public sector. It is the first university in Europe integrating academic studies and work experience systematically institution-wide on a large scale, working with 9000 private and public organisations.

Dublin City University

Dublin City University is a world leader in designing, implementing and researching new blended, online and digital (BOLD) models of education. DCU is committed to providing strategic leadership, building strong communities of innovation, and contributing to world-class research.

Fondazione Politecnico di Milano (FPM)

FPM is a foundation and research institute strictly connected to the Politecnico di Milano University, aimed at building a bridge between the teaching and research activities in the university and the corporate sectors. In particular, the Digital Learning Area of FPM investigates innovative didactical solutions (MOOCs, gamification, OER development and use) that support learning at scale. FPM supports SMEs in programmes of business growth centered on multidisciplinary training to prepare companies for future trends.

Instructure Global Ltd.

Known for making teaching and learning easier through open, usable, cloud-based technologies, Instructure has connected millions of instructors and learners at more than 3,000 higher education, further education, secondary education, and corporate institutions throughout the world. Through Canvas VLE, Instructure supports the development of OER resources, repositories and research. Instructure believes it critical that educators have the ability to effectively find, utilize, and assess high-quality OERs in any learning environment.

International Council for Distance Education

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) is the leading global membership organization for open, distance, flexible and online education (including e-learning). ICDE draws its membership from institutions, educational authorities, commercial actors, and individuals in more than 70 countries. ICDE organize events, conduct studies, projects and comprehensive information and communication activities to promote high quality educational opportunity for all.

Joubel

Since 2014 Joubel has been working on improving the world of Interactive content by establishing and leading the H5P project. H5P is a plugin for existing publishing systems that empowers users to create interactive content like Interactive Videos, Presentations, Games, Quizzes and more. Joubel has collaborated with the open source community to create more than 40 H5P content types. Joubel works towards the vision of empowering everyone to create, share and reuse interactive OER content.

Knowledge 4 All Foundation Ltd (K4A)

K4A is a distributed institute based in London (UK) with 2 main streams of activities (pioneering Machine Learning methods of pattern analysis, statistical modeling and computational learning; and transforming these into technologies for large scale applications in Open Education). It advocates AI & big data in Open Education. K4A supports its 1000+ researchers and 62 member institutions by co-funding more than 260 events, 60+ machine learning challenges, 20.000 academic video lectures and creating machine learning tools and software.

The Open University (UK)

The Open University (UK) is a world leader in increasing access to education which, alongside its core provision in distance learning, has provided many innovative OER repositories (including OpenLearn, Open Research Online, FutureLearn) and leadership in OER research (OER Research Hub; Global OER Graduate Network). The Open University is the largest UK university and one of the largest universities in the world.

UNIR | La Universidad en Internet

UNIR is an online university from Spain with a strong commitment to its growing open education network. UNIR recently adopted an internal open education policy and is active in projects such as Open Educators Factory and OpenMed. The Research Institute for Innovation & Technology in Education (UNIR iTED) holds a UNESCO Chair on eLearning, an ICDE Chair in OER, and Delegation IITE for Southern Europe and Latin America (UNESCO Institute for Information and Technology in Education).

Associated Partners

In addition to the core consortium, ENCORE+ comprises many associated partners from manifold sectors. In the private sector these include technology, communication and resourcing businesses such as IBM, Adecco, Bayer, and Telefónica.

ENCORE+ is also supported by sectoral and international organisations including: UNESCO; Open Educational Global; European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU); European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE); and Open Iceseo. This international network is further supported by dozens of higher education institutions, associations, networks, NGOs, businesses and projects in European and non-European countries.

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Website

For further and updated information about this project please see:

www.encoreproject.eu

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Project partners:



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION



DHBW
Duale Hochschule
Baden-Württemberg



The Open
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unir
LA UNIVERSIDAD
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Joubel



Fondazione
Politecnico
di Milano



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