Building the European Network for Catalysing open Resources in Education (WP 2)

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Strategy Paper: Recommendations for building the future European OER repository ecosystem (D 2.3)

encore+

European Network for Catalysing
Open Resources in Education

Table of Contents

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The European OER Ecosystem 2030

The Europe-wide integration of Open Educational Resources in education has remained in its starting blocks (Inamorato et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). While Open Education has been a component of educational research and practice for almost thirty years, it has only been adopted fragmentary and on the margins (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). Despite the existence of national and regional OER-initiatives as well as the great potential of OER for higher education at all levels, neither OER nor Open Educational Practices are widely used in all European countries (Ehlers & Bonaudo, 2020).

This stands contrary to the expectations, because due to its accessibility, open licensing and availability in Europe, paired with the digitalization of education, OER should be easy to integrate. One reason that the widespread uptake of OER in Europe is yet to happen, is the lack of distribution of strategies for integration into organizations like educational and corporate institutions (Farrell et al., 2022).

Another reason is the ongoing discussion about the differing quality of OER and OER repositories (Ehlers et al., 2014; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2022). Interaction between higher education and business regarding OER also happens rather sporadically, because as of yet, OER still has to be successfully integrated on a widespread level into consistent business models. A sustainable network of OER actors in Europe and the continuous exchange of good practice examples can respond to these challenges.

This is why ENCORE+, a Knowledge Alliance project funded by the European Commission under ERASMUS+, has been initiated. ENCORE+ seeks to support the uptake of OER in Europe by catalyzing OER practices and sharing OER innovations. The project aim is, not only to strengthen the value of OER as a catalyst and multiplier, but also to move from individual OER initiatives into a European OER Ecosystem (Ehlers, 2022) by developing a meaningful human network consisting of best practices and OER stakeholders. ENCORE+ connects OER communities from different fields of practice – quality, technology, innovation and policy – in a viable OER ecosystem across Europe.

To build this European OER ecosystem, the ENCORE+ project contains policy recommendations through a cross-data source analysis, with the aim of informing policy makers and decision takers on the facilitation of an European OER area. It

integrates existing policy approaches with the good practices identified and contextualizes strategies in relation to the UNESCO recommendation on OER with the aim of creating a positive vision for the future of OER in Europe. In order to find this common positive vision for OER in Europe, on which recommendations can then be based, a Hybrid Delphi Study was conducted (Ehlers & Schmidbauer, 2022).

How we approach OER and OEP - practices which address not only policy makers, but the whole OER governance community (Ehlers, 2011) - today will significantly influence the reality of tomorrow, so it is important to work together towards a shared, community-based vision and to find a consensus to guide actions for practice.

The UNESCO Recommendation on OER (2019) addresses five objectives: (i) building capacity of stakeholders to create, access, re-use, adapt and redistribute OER; (ii) developing supportive policy; (iii) encouraging inclusive and equitable quality OER; (iv) nurturing the creation of sustainability models for OER, and (v) facilitating international cooperation. Here we describe how it is possible to move towards the first of these objectives through a focus on (ii) developing supportive policy.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Based on the above mentioned UNESCO Recommendation on OER and taking into consideration previous research within the ENCORE+ project, such as the Hybrid Delphi Study as a foresight on the European OER Ecosystem 2030 and the ENCORE+ integration events on innovation in Higher Education, business innovation and employment as well as business-university cooperation, the following recommendations for policy makers can be made.

Raise awareness

The focus lies on awareness, advocacy and capacity building. Therefore, on the one hand, engagement in information campaigns to articulate and communicate the OER value proposition to a wide range of stakeholders is needed. On the other hand OER has to be considered as Part of Competence Frameworks, which means that for a viable European OER ecosystem, especially professional educators have to be taught OER skills, serving as multipliers. For this, national training actions for HEIs staff on the technical management and operation of open repositories as well as on OER use, reuse and innovative practice is essential.

Identify good practices

It must be ensured that OER related policies are not conflicting with other policies related to innovation of HEIs (for instance in relation to copyright and copyleft management for learning material). This can be reached through supporting the identification of good practices and their scalability across HEIs (by developing for instance national observatories on innovation and OER).

Fund open repositories, establish quality standards and integrate OER into institutional strategies and policies

Funding for the establishment of open repositories (national, regional, institutional) within higher education must be provided in order to promote and integrate OER in HEIs curricula and support recognition of OER supported learning, reinforcing credentialing mechanisms (e.g. micro credentialing). Integration of OER and OER repositories into institutional strategies and policies needs not only to be reinforced by organizations, but also by political bodies like the European Commission. As there is currently no standard or quality mark for a 'high-quality' learning-object repository, the support of European-level policy makers is essential in order to discover and use high quality resources as well as to establish quality standards for such repositories to be included in the learning exchanges (Ehlers et al., 2014).

Create expert hubs and strengthen university-business collaboration

Facilitating effective collaboration is a key aspect where OER can catalyze innovation processes. To reach this university-business collaborations need to be strengthened through strategic funding from public bodies. That way international collaborations among HEIs focused on OER supported innovation for good practice localisation, dedicated research enhancement and creation of expert hubs can be promoted.

Ensure diffusion and sustainability

In the medium to longer term, ensuring the diffusion and sustainability of innovation in OER ecosystems is essential. This can be supported by organizing adequate support for ICT, legal and educational aspects supporting OER innovation processes in HEIs as well as by designing for, supporting and teaching the 'open' aspect in teaching/pedagogy.

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5

Monitor the impact of OER use and fund research to improve OER accessibility

It is important to recognize that there is a role for monitoring the impact of OER use on practice (particularly relating to innovation). Suggested actions in support of this include: Providing and using frameworks for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes supported by OER, conducting regular impact assessment exercises on the impact of OER in supporting innovation processes within HEIs and funding research to improve OER discoverability, usability and accessibility.

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