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OER Research Hub Data 2013-2015: Informal Learners

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The OER Research Hub is a project funded by the Hewlett Foundation to research the impact of open educational resources (OER) on teaching and learning. During 2013-2015 survey data were collected from approximately 7,500 users of OER around the globe. This report presents a frequencies analysis of responses obtained from INFORMAL LEARNERS (i.e. learners who are not registered for a course at an educational institution).

Dataset available for download at http://figshare.com/articles/OERRH_Survey_Data_2013_2015/1528263
Decision to use OER

Which of the following factors influenced your decision to use OER? N=3147

- 89% The opportunity to study at reduced or no cost
- 32% The chance to try university-level content before paying for a course
- 59% The materials can be used flexibly
- 74% The materials can be accessed at any time
- 74% The materials can be studied online
- 75% A desire to have a learning experience/study a course
- 14% A need to find information (but not study a course)

Cost remains the biggest factor driving OER adoption
Use of OER

In what subject(s) do you normally use OER? N=2401

- Computer & Information Science: 31.8%
- Psychology & Philosophy: 25.2%
- Religious Studies: 8.2%
- Social Sciences: 20.4%
- Languages & Linguistics: 24.3%
- Science: 28.2%
- Mathematics: 26.4%
- Arts: 20.4%
- Literature: 19.5%
- History & Geography: 22.8%
- Economics, Business & Management: 30.6%
- Applied Science & Engineering: 16.9%
- Medicine: 8.6%
- Health & Social Care: 11.1%
- Education Studies: 11.5%
- Physical Ed: 3%
- Special Ed: 2.4%

Economics and Computer Science top wide subject coverage of OER used by informal learners.
Types of OER

Which of the following types of OER have you used for studying? N=2232

A smaller number of respondents (N=101) were asked about their use of lesson plans (32.7%), data sets (22.8%) and learning tools, instruments & software plugins (34.7%).
Selecting OER

Which of the following factors would make you more likely to select a particular resource when searching for open educational content? N=3012

- Evidence of interest in that resource (e.g. lots of downloads) 38%
- The resource being recently created, uploaded or updated 30%
- The resource being easy to download 52%
- A description of learning objectives or outcomes being provided 63%
- The resource being created by a reputable/trusted institution/person 56%
- The resource having a Creative Commons license 16%
- The resource having an open license allowing adaptation 14%
- The length/complexity of the resource 35%
- Use of interactive or multimedia content (e.g. video) 43%
- Positive user ratings or comments about the resource 45%
- Personal recommendation 38%
- Having previously used this resource successfully 36%
- The resource being relevant to my particular interests/needs 70%
- The resource featuring a catchy title or attractive image(s) 9%
- A detailed description of the resource content being provided 45%

Relevance to one’s particular needs and clear learning objectives guide informal learners’ selection of open content. Few mindful of open licenses allowing adaptation.
Challenges of using OER

Which challenges, if any, do you most often face in using OER? N=1723

- Overcoming technology problems: 26.6%
- Knowing where to find resources: 48.8%
- Finding suitable resources in my subject area: 45.9%
- Finding resources of sufficiently high quality: 38.2%
- Finding resources that are up-to-date: 28.3%
- Finding resources relevant to my context: 18.4%
- Not having time to look for resources: 23.3%
- Not having connections with OER-using peers: 15.5%
- Missing the support of a teacher: 18.7%

Discoverability of resources, quality and subject coverage are the most pressing challenges faced by informal learners using OER.

Support techniques

Which of these techniques have you used to support your learning with OER? N=1921

- Writing or reading blogs: 38.8%
- Discussion with others in person: 37%
- Discussion in online forums: 38.7%
- Writing my own study notes: 50.5%
- Informal study groups: 16.2%
- Use of a learning diary: 25%
- Use of a study calendar: 24.2%

Informal learners use a variety of techniques to support their study with OER.
Future behaviour

As a result of using [OpenLearn] resources, how likely are you to do any of the following? N=2701

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>More likely</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>Less likely</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take a free course/study an OER</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a paid-for course</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do further research in the subject of my interest</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download more OER</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share OER with others</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend OER to others</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High percentages of informal learners likely to continue using OER. A quarter of respondents inclined to go into formal education.