

Open Peer Review

Schares, E. (2022, October). [Review of the article, Do OER textbooks have value beyond cost savings? An analysis of student attitudes and faculty teaching strategies in an American university, by Y. Wu]. Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, 1(1), 113-116. doi: 10.13001/joerhe.v1i1.7201

Reviewer: Eric Schares

Recommendation: Revisions Required

Scope, Objectives, Content

Is the article in scope for Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education? Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics? Is the topic an important one, or is it trivial or of low priority?

Yes, article is in scope for JOERHE. Deals directly with students and instructors using OERs.

Organization

Does the article proceed logically? As applicable, does the article adhere to a recommended structure and the section guideline?

Yes, article is structured well.

Methodology, Approach, Conclusions

The methodology for data gathering and analysis should be appropriate for the problem addressed. Inferences from data should be sound--the author should not reach unsupported conclusions. Not all papers will use a scientific research methodology, but all should employ sound reasoning and an adequate balance between description and critical analysis. Consider: Is the article factually accurate? Is it clear the author knows, or has investigated, previous work on the subject of the article? Has the author failed to reference recent or seminal work on the subject?

Methodology is sound and claims to be IRB-approved.

Writing Style, References

Please indicate whether there are problems with expression or flow, but do not comment about grammar or basic edits. Do NOT take the time to do copy editing - that will be handled later in the process. However, general comments pointing out problems with style or format are useful.

Have some concerns with references, elaboration requested, etc. See attached file for full comments.

Application:

Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Yes

What are the stronger points/qualities of the article?

This paper looks at OER textbook usage, attitude, faculty emphasis, and textbook price to investigate if students are more likely to use a textbook that is freely available. Overall, this is a good exploration of an interesting topic and makes a valuable contribution to the literature.

What are the weaker points/qualities of the article? How could they be strengthened?

I did have a few unanswered questions however that I would like the author to further elaborate on before publication. Please see attached file for full comments.

Peer Review Ranking: Scope

Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics?

Highly Relevant

Peer Review Ranking: Clarity

Clarity of expression and flow? Does the article proceed logically?

Clear

Peer Review Ranking: Contribution

Contribution to Higher Education research and/or practice

Contributes

Peer Review Ranking: Research Assessment

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate?

Appropriate

Peer Review Ranking: Research Assessment

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate? Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Sound

Overall Evaluation

1- Weak Accept

Supplemental File Comments

This paper looks at OER textbook usage, attitude, faculty emphasis, and textbook price to investigate if students are more likely to use a textbook that is freely available. Overall, this is a good exploration of an interesting topic and makes a valuable contribution to the literature. I did have a few unanswered questions however that I would like the author to further elaborate on before publication.

Major issues:

A main unanswered question I have from this paper is related to faculty. Page 4 states that the nine courses which make up the dataset were taught by instructors who were OER stipend recipients. What criteria were used to award these stipends? Is it payment just to use an OER, or payment to help develop their own OER? A main conclusion of this paper is that student use of OER (or any textbook?) is highly dependent on instructor emphasis and effort to incorporate into the course; ENGL 1 & 2 used the OERs heavily, as evidenced by Figure 7. I found it very strange that instructors who were paid to use OER could simply add it to a Supplemental or Recommended Reading list, not fully incorporate it into the course, yet still be awarded the stipend money. “Textbook reading was not emphasized” (p. 12). So why did the instructors of MATH 1, 2, and COMP even apply for and get awarded stipends? More clarity on this would be appreciated.

Please change all pie graphs from 3D to a flat 2D view. There are numerous well-documented problems with interpreting this style of graph, and the third dimension does not add any visual encoding to the data.

Minor issues:

I found it strange to include so many citations into the same parenthetical (Introduction, Lit Review). Surely not *all* these references say the same thing? Do all six references in the Introduction agree on 82% of undergraduates not completing assigned readings? Same with page 3 “studies also surveyed how students feel about OER...” What do the studies say?

“In fact, there is a debate among instructional faculty...” citation is needed here.

In Lit Review, you have references to studies which show textbook usage is low even when students could afford them. This seems particularly relevant to this study. Please elaborate with some findings.

“Some studies have noted that at times OER can even lead to fewer students using...” Why? Please elaborate from the reference.

Survey questions: please define underrepresented backgrounds. Seems to be derived from Q7, but there is no further explanation. As this is a highly used datapoint in the analysis, more information is requested.

p. 10 “whereas other students are more likely to use textbooks a little to none” Should this specify *OER* textbooks, or all textbooks as a whole?

As mentioned above, it seems to me the main criteria is instructor emphasis. The strong usage in ENGL courses should almost single-handedly be the cause of the weak relationship found in STEM vs. non-STEM courses at the bottom of page 10. Seems to be almost a confounding variable. A follow up on instructor attitudes would be very interesting.

Figure 8: can the student choose only one option for reason for purchasing/not purchasing textbook, or multiple choices?

p. 15: perhaps rethink word choice of “reputation”