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Open educational resources in the context of language learning and teaching

Open Educational Resources (OER) movement represents a global initiative that fosters collaboration among educators and institutions while promoting equal access to knowledge and learning opportunities. Initially introduced as innovative instruments within a traditional educational context, OER are defined by open licenses that permit the use, adaptation, and redistribution of materials without consent from the author. The integration of OER into language learning expands accessibility to authentic learning materials and contributes to the development of learner autonomy, intercultural awareness, and digital literacy. The article examines the role of OER in the context of language learning and provides a classification of widely used platforms offering freely accessible and openly licensed materials for the development of language skills. Reviewed OER combine multiple resource types to create personalized language-learning experiences. Additionally, the study highlights the challenges related to OER adoption, including learners' awareness, quality assurance, copyright issues, digital competence and the institutional support. The results indicate that successful integration of OER in language teaching requires not only knowledge of available resources but also educators' ability to critically assess and pedagogically adapt OER to ensure alignment with intended learning outcomes.

Keywords: digitalization; open education; licensing terms; language learning; OER platforms, autonomous learning, collaboration

Introduction

Education systems around the world are experiencing rapid changes under the influence of digitalization, globalization and new learning paradigms. It is driven by innovative tools and strategies that make learning more accessible, engaging, and affordable. One of the key trends in this transformation is growing movement toward open access since there is evidence of increasing the dissemination of science and knowledge and sharing it with others without limits or conditions. The concept of openness in education is closely linked with open pedagogy. Open pedagogy, often known as OEP, is a concept closely tied to Open Educational Resources (OER) and defined as “the set of teaching and learning practices that are only possible or practical in the context of the 5R (retain, reuse, revise, remix, redistribute) permissions which are characteristic of OER”. The term “OER” was first introduced at the UNESCO Forum and defined as learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others [1]. The defining characteristic that sets an Open Educational Resource apart from other learning materials is its licensing terms that require no permission from the copyright holder to reuse and adapt materials. OER are learning resources, including full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any of their tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

Over the past 20 years, open education has become a global movement affecting all levels of education. OER are now widely used across various educational contexts and more recent efforts have focused on research and development of open educational practices, which encompass “all activities that open up access to educational opportunity, in a context where freely available online content and services... are taken as the norm” [2], and the teaching of languages is no exception to this global trend. OER for language teaching and learning enable international collaboration [3] and equal access to learning irrespective of economic situation. In the field of language education, OER provide teachers and learners with unprecedented access to authentic materials, online courses, videos, and digital tools that can be adapted for individual or classroom

use. Yang and Sun found that using Open Courseware can aid EFL learners in expanding their vocabulary, especially in acquiring technical terms [4]. Similarly, Celik, in a national study conducted in Turkey, reported that Wikipedia is an example of an OER and was the most commonly used resource among local EFL teachers. These online tools were mainly used to enhance students' grammar and reading skills. In addition, the integration of OER into language learning promotes learner autonomy, intercultural competence, and digital literacy which are essential for the 21st-century learner [5]. The study carried out by Rets, Coughlan, Stickler, and Astruc analyzed the text complexity of 200 OER reading materials from various educational levels and subject areas on two major OER platforms [6]. The findings offered empirical evidence supporting existing concerns: over 86 % of these materials demand an advanced level of English proficiency. This indicates a potential mismatch between the language skills of many OER users and the linguistic demands of the resources intended to promote inclusive education. Since prior research has shown that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is ineffective, especially in online learning, which allows for significant personalization [6] it becomes crucial to explore strategies that enhance the global accessibility of OERs.

Nowadays among competencies communicative skills in a foreign language take priority due to considering it as a mandatory requirement to contribute to economic and cultural growth of a country. The ubiquitous nature of internet resources gives rise to new knowledge ecologies that involve foreign languages context and language users, teachers, researchers. Due to its immense potential in the learning of foreign languages it has led to a considerable shift in the approaches used to develop language skills. Despite the fact that open educational resources movement has been around for 20 years, little attention has been paid with regard to practical usage of OER in language learning. To be more specific, there is a scarcity of empirical studies related to the effectiveness of OERs in the teaching and learning of languages [7, 8]. Thoms et al. state, "the bulk of research related to open education and second language (L2) learning and teaching has primarily focused on the creation, adaptation, and/or (re)use of OER content in FL contexts", and not really on the effects of educational materials on the learning [9]. Although there is strong institutional support for fostering students' multicultural competence, many English language teachers face significant challenges when trying to integrate multicultural education into their curricula, especially since English is taught as a foreign language [10]. These challenges arise from multiple factors. As Byram and Kramsch point out, teachers often hesitate to teach cultural content due to fears of reinforcing stereotypes or being unable to explain cultural concepts clearly, largely because of their limited background in this area [11]. Additionally, cultural instruction is typically delivered through teacher-centered explanations, while students tend to prefer more interactive, student-driven learning methods. This gap between teaching styles and learning preferences makes it more challenging for educators to effectively integrate multicultural elements into English language teaching [10]. Moreover, many EFL instructors are obligated to use textbooks prescribed by ministries of education. Since no textbook can fully meet all learners' needs, teachers worldwide can enhance their lessons by accessing OER databases to locate and adapt activities suitable for their specific student groups. For numerous learners, the combined cost of English courses and textbooks poses a financial burden. Open Educational Resources help ease this issue by providing free, high-quality learning materials.

This article explains the role of OER in language learning by identifying major platforms offering open, freely accessible materials, analyzing how these resources support personalized language development, and examining the key challenges such as quality, copyright, digital literacy, and institutional support that must be addressed to effectively integrate OER into language teaching.

Methods and materials

The research uses the method of theoretical analysis. Given the purpose of the research, this approach is suitable for examining the works of leading scholars in the field. It is considered most effective to synthesize the findings obtained through analysis and formulate an independent perspective based on them [12].

Literature review

For nearly two decades, Open Educational Resources have been shaping the educational environment, actively supporting broader access to high-quality educational opportunities [13]. Conceptualized as open educational resources in 2002, the field has acquired strong transformative potential by uniting the pedagogical and digital dimensions, as it promotes learning materials to build ubiquitous learning networks while the ease of sharing digital resources online enables reducing the knowledge divide that separates and partitions societies [14]. According to several studies, the primary advantages of OER have been reported in reducing learning cost [15], increasing affordability and accessibility [16], and improving education quality [17]. The-

se are key factors that strongly affect both instructors' and students' motivation and willingness to use them, as the high cost of quality learning materials can limit opportunities for gaining knowledge and experience.

The bulk of research related to open education has been conducted examining the factors related to students' interaction with OER materials and the effects on their educational progress [18]. A recent systematic literature review shows that the impact of OERs extends beyond course grades, contributing to overall academic progress. Research indicates that students enrolled in courses utilizing OER tend to advance toward their degrees more quickly. For example, it was found that community college students taking OER-based courses complete more credits than those in traditional courses [19]. Similarly, earlier studies revealed that students who used OER were more likely to enroll in additional courses in following semesters. Moreover, research has also shown that students in OER-supported classes have lower withdrawal rates, reinforcing the idea that OER use promotes stronger academic persistence and progress toward degree completion [20].

The different individual practices of OER adoption focus on addressing the high cost of textbooks [21]. Copyright affordances proposed by OER have created new opportunities for teaching and learning. Initially, these tools focus on reducing financial barriers providing freely available materials to improve access and affordability for students. However, beyond cost reduction, OER also serve as an innovation in curriculum design, pedagogy and professional development. In this manner, OER contribute to building an institutional culture characterized by innovation and continuous enhancement of teaching and learning practices which is increasingly optimal for shaping a sustainable, adaptable, student-centred future [22].

Many studies have addressed teachers' perspectives on collaborating to create a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) as an open educational resource. Koukis and Jimoyiannis investigated three dimensions: teachers' personal engagement, their interaction and mutual support, and their collaborative creation of teaching materials and learning scenarios. The study revealed that teachers value MOOCs for professional development and are willing to adopt other forms of OER to enhance subject instruction, knowledge construction, and their own professional growth [23].

Research in this area is constantly developing, with a particular emphasis on OER challenges related to awareness, creation, use [24]. Hylén highlighted three major barriers concerning the wider adoption of Open Educational Resources: limited awareness of academic copyrights and licensing, concerns about the quality of open content, and the long-term sustainability of institutional OER initiatives [25]. Kotsiou and Shores identified financial constraints as a major barrier to OER adoption and suggested three main funding sources: private, governmental, and institutional [26]. They also identified that many faculty members lack awareness of what OER are, the benefits they offer, and how copyright and Creative Commons licenses work. Limited training and support were highlighted as additional obstacles. Similar challenges were noted by Schuwer and Janssen, who also pointed to a cultural reluctance to share teaching materials and the absence of immediate consequences for using copyrighted resources. Investigations carried out by Mićunović also ensure that concerns regarding the quality of OER [27] that remains a major issue to their adoption [28], with the constantly evolving nature of these resources requiring an even higher level of trust between creators and users [29]. Studies also show that many OER repositories do not provide quality-assurance systems [30], and this absence of oversight has created difficulties for both educators and learners [31]. A proposed solution is to incorporate OER development and the assessment of their accessibility and quality into teacher training programs [32].

An analysis of the abovementioned authors' concepts indicates that long-term benefits offered by Open Educational Resources in the process of teaching demonstrate substantial potential to reshape traditional educational practices. The findings evidence the increasing significance of Open Educational Resources that is represented in terms of the cost reduction and accessibility of learning content with the individuals' possibilities to adapt, revise and redistribute materials. Due to their flexible set of licenses the learning content is provided to suit various learning communities, supporting pedagogical flexibility and innovation. Moreover, OER promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among educators, which contributes to the continuous improvement of educational resources and supports equity in education by making high-quality materials more widely available. Thus, achieving the high quality in education is another opportunity offered by the OER, and for ending up with the probable improvements proposed by OER, it is important to incorporate OER development and the assessment of their accessibility and quality into teacher training programs. This is highly recommended for providing ongoing guidance and support among teachers in order to avoid main issues related to their awareness of licenses, supporting education quality and involvement in long-term OER initiatives.

Repositories of Open Educational Resources in language learning

According to D. Altunay, the role of OER in language learning and teaching can be framed through several language acquisition theories, including the Input Hypothesis, Interaction Hypothesis, and Sociocultural Theory [33]. From the perspective of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, a second language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language that they can understand through listening or reading — even if it includes some unfamiliar grammar or vocabulary [34, 35]. OER provide this type of comprehensible input, offering learners understandable language that produces new forms and supports natural acquisition. Similarly, the Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes that learning is strengthened through communication and negotiation of meaning with more proficient speakers, such as through feedback or clarification [36]. Within the Sociocultural Theory, OER are connected with the ideas of scaffolding and Activity Theory, which view learning as a socially mediated process supported by collaboration. Digital tools including discussion boards, blogs, and wikis enable students to involve in the learning process through the active interaction. Finally, according to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, OER help create relaxed and motivating learning environments by reducing anxiety and increasing engagement. Studies show that computer-assisted learning lowers stress levels [37], suggesting that OER's interactive and flexible nature can enhance both confidence and enjoyment in language learning context.

A growing interest in sharing OER has been supported by a group of academic institutions. Even though Open Educational Resources can be found throughout the internet, it is often most convenient to search for them through dedicated databases such as OER Commons (oercommons.org), MERLOT (merlot.org), or Teaching Commons (teachingcommons.us). Since many of the same materials appear across these platforms, educators can concentrate on becoming proficient in using just one of them [38]. In order to identify reputable ROER that are popular and contain OER for language teaching and learning, this study investigated the websites of tens of university libraries that suggest such ROER according to their types. Open Educational Resources for language learning can include any freely accessible and openly licensed materials that support the development of language skills. Here are the main types:

Text-based OER, such as open textbooks, grammar guides, and reading materials, provide learners with comprehensible input, which is central to Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Learners acquire language when they are exposed to understandable and meaningful linguistic input that is slightly above their current level of competence. Popular platforms OER Commons and COERLL offer open reading materials and exercises providing authentic language forms and structures. This supports learners' understanding of real-world language use in context. Such resources are often used to develop learners' reading and writing skills. Platforms OER Commons, Open Textbook Library, and COERLL (Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning) provide openly accessible textbooks and reading content in various languages. These materials support self-study and classroom use, allowing teachers and learners to adapt them according to their personal interests, expectations and needs. While many scholars take a broad perspective on OER and open educational practices [39, 40], OER textbooks remain the most effective tool for directly lowering access and learning barriers. Almost 90 % of faculty members view cost as a key consideration when choosing textbooks. In fact, student cost is the aspect of textbooks that instructors are least satisfied with [41]. Given that OER textbooks can significantly cut costs without compromising learning quality [42], a widespread shift from traditional textbooks to OER would be expected [43]. An open textbook is a specific form of Open Educational Resource (OER). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a textbook is a resource that provides in-depth information on a subject for learners. What distinguishes an open textbook is its open license, which at minimum allows it to be freely shared without requiring extra permissions. In many cases, the license also permits modification and commercial use, making it easier to tailor the content to particular teaching or learning needs [44].

Text-Based Resources:

- OER Commons — <https://www.oercommons.org>. Contains open textbooks, grammar guides, and reading materials for many languages.
- Open Textbook Library — <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks>. Includes free textbooks for ESL, French, Spanish, and others.
- COERLL (Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning) — <https://coerll.utexas.edu>. Offers open courses like Deutsch im Blick and Français interactif.
- MERLOT — <https://www.merlot.org>. Large collection of language teaching and learning materials.

Audio and video OER, including podcasts, open-access lectures, and language-learning videos play a vital role in enhancing students' listening comprehension and pronunciation abilities. As D. Altunay highlights, multimedia OER enable learners to acquire spoken language within meaningful contexts [33]. Platforms such as BBC Languages Archive or COERLL YouTube Channel offer rich auditory and visual input. These tools simultaneously overwhelm users with the opportunities of imitation and oral practice, facilitating integration of input and output processes in language learning. These resources deliver authentic linguistic exposure and support the development of listening, pronunciation, and spoken language across multiple languages. They include podcasts, language-learning videos, and open-access recordings. Furthermore, repositories such as Internet Archive offer freely available multimedia materials, further providing active involvement in real-life communicative scenarios.

Audio and Video Resources (Podcasts, YouTube Channels, Audiobooks):

- BBC Languages Archive — <https://www.bbc.co.uk/languages>.
- COERLL YouTube Channel — <https://www.youtube.com/user/coerll>. Openly licensed videos for various languages.
- Internet Archive — <https://archive.org>. Audiobooks, pronunciation lessons, and language learning recordings in the public domain.

Interactive OER, including platforms such as H5P, Anki, and Moodle shows strong ties to Long's Interaction Hypothesis. It emphasizes the importance of communication and feedback in language learning. These digital platforms facilitate learners' engagement by providing interaction with the content, receiving instant feedback, and supporting communicative activities. Through such interactions, learners negotiate meaning, promoting deeper cognitive processing and more effective acquisition of linguistic structures. Interactive OER encompass digital platforms and open-source applications that encourage active participation and practice, offering open-access learning environments, quizzes, flashcards, and interactive games. These tools help learners practice vocabulary and grammar with the engagement in personalized and interactive learning exercises.

Interactive and Digital Tools

- Moodle — <https://moodle.org>. Open-source learning platform used to host language courses.
- H5P — <https://h5p.org>. Create and share interactive exercises, quizzes, and games.
- AnkiWeb — <https://ankiweb.net>. Free, user-created flashcard decks for vocabulary learning.

OER course materials available on platforms such as OpenLearn and MIT OpenCourseWare offer a new stimulus for structured input through a combination of reading and listening tasks, alongside output-focused activities such as writing, and speaking exercises. These tools reflect a communicative approach to language teaching, enabling both instructors and learners to adapt and reuse content to meet specific learning objectives. By integrating receptive and productive language skills, both the Input Hypothesis and Output Hypothesis are supported. Open courseware platforms such as OpenLearn (The Open University), MIT OpenCourseWare, and Open Michigan offer complete course materials, including lectures, exercises, and assessments which are particularly valuable for teachers seeking flexible content and for learners aiming to follow well-structured language programs.

Course materials and Lesson Plans

- OpenLearn (The Open University) — <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>. Free language courses and cultural modules.
- MIT OpenCourseWare — <https://ocw.mit.edu>. Offers free courses like Spanish I & II.
- Open Michigan — <https://open.umich.edu>. Contains course materials for language learning.

The use of collaborative OER, such as Wikibooks and Wikiversity, is connected with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and collaboration. In these online communities, creating, editing, and sharing language learning content is at the core of what OER has to offer. This process promotes authentic communication, scaffolding, and peer learning among participants. Collaborative OER encourage learner and teacher participation in creating and sharing knowledge. Projects Wikibooks and Wikiversity, due to its digital nature, allow users to write, edit, and improve open textbooks and language courses. In turn, these collaborative tools promote peer learning and the exchange of authentic language content, reflecting real-world language use and environment involvement.

Collaborative Resources

- Wikibooks — <https://en.wikibooks.org>. Open textbooks for languages like Spanish, French, German, etc.
- Wikiversity — <https://en.wikiversity.org>. Language courses developed by global communities.

– LingQ (partially open) — <https://www.lingq.com>. Some open reading and listening materials for self-study.

To provide some evidence of the usefulness of OER in terms of cultural dimensions Wikimedia Commons, Europeana, and Project Gutenberg support stakeholders' better understanding about cultural contexts of a language. These OER offer learners access to authentic cultural materials, including literature, audio, video, and art, which reflect real-world language use. As noted by D. Altunay, engagement with such resources enhances learners' intercultural competence and deepens their contextual perception of language. Engagement with authentic OER allows learners to gain a number of useful insights in terms of cultural, historical, and pragmatic dimensions of language, thereby strengthening contextual and communicative competence. OER such as Wikimedia Commons, Project Gutenberg, and Europeana provide open access to literature, images, audio, and videos representing diverse cultures and languages. It shows a great need to provide learners with the exposure to various cultural content, enabling learners to acquire not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness.

Cultural and Authentic Resources

– Wikimedia Commons — <https://commons.wikimedia.org>. Images, audio, and videos for cultural and contextual learning.

– Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org>. Free eBooks and literature in multiple languages.

– Europeana — <https://www.europeana.eu>. Open cultural heritage materials (texts, videos, artworks) across European languages.

The reality of rapidly developing pedagogical practices in foreign languages takes effect in open education. From the resources listed above, which are only a few compared to the multitude available on the internet, it is evident that many educational institutions are actively participating in the creation and distribution of OER in the context of language teaching and learning. These Open Educational Resources seem the most effective in meeting the requirements of stakeholders, especially, their digital nature found beneficial not only to develop learners' language skills but also to improve self-regulation which influences both motivation and autonomy. Beyond direct effects on language skills such as vocabulary, grammar and communicative skills on a topic of interest, the affordance of OER, such as learner's self-control over pace, multimodal content, and opportunities for repeated, self-directed practice foster learners' self-regulation, which, in turn, affects learners' capacity to set learning goals, select strategies, monitor progress and sustain motivation. Self-regulatory development mediates the relationship between resource access and language outcomes, because learners who deploy planning, monitoring and reflection make more effective use of OER and thus achieve better linguistic gains.

Results and Discussion

There is no doubt that efficient delivery of learning content to stakeholder has stimulated changes in the practice of language learning and teaching. To be more specific, OER can make educational activities more transparent, support collaboration between students and educators from different institutions, and introduce new economic models for producing and accessing learning materials. Language learning requires constant exposure to various linguistic input, real-life communication, and authentic contexts. Open Educational Resources contribute not only to linguistic competence but also the formation of learners' capacities such as self-regulation, autonomy, intrinsic motivation that amplify the long-term effectiveness of language learning. Given the wide variation in the quality of OER, teachers and administrators should carefully evaluate whether these resources are appropriate for their courses. Identifying OER that respond to instructional needs also requires good search competencies and appropriate search techniques. This issue can be addressed through the use of traditional discovery tools, including referatories and OER, specific search engines, as well as advanced discovery mechanisms such as tagging, ratings, comments, and recommendation tools. Additionally, various user guides and manuals provide users with practical instructions on how to search for and evaluate OER [26, 27]. Moreover, as previously mentioned, existing studies suggest that incorporating OER creation and the evaluation of their accessibility and quality into teacher training education and professional development programs can support more informed and effective OER use [28]. This is due to pedagogical reflection and innovation promoted in order to raise teachers' awareness of different educational practices and adapt popular resources and approaches in the various learning contexts. Space provided as a result of active encouragement and training among teachers affects the growth of groups of contributors in the community where works become visible and accessible.

Conclusion

Overall, by systematically classifying widely used OER platforms, the research demonstrates the capacity of these resources to support flexible and varied approaches for the development of language skills and personalized learning environments. Conceptual analysis ensures that educational value of OER in language education depends not only on individuals' knowledge of the use of available platforms but also on their ability to critically evaluate, contextualize and thoughtfully adapt open resources in accordance with pedagogical goals set. A considerable research examination of OER opportunities reveals a consistently positive impact of multiple resource formats on the process of language acquisition. To be more specific, the flexible nature of OER provide opportunities for both teachers and learners, facilitating the implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches, in terms of the materials' authenticity, interaction and feedback, scaffolding, and peer learning, which, in turn, affect the development of learners' self-regulation and autonomy, digital literacy in the teaching process. Moreover, the use of OER promotes global collaboration, the exchange of best practices, and the creation of inclusive learning community in accordance with various linguistic and cultural needs. However, successful adoption of OER should be realized with the concern in terms of quality standards, copyright affordances, digital literacy, and institutional recognition. Addressing these challenges is critical for enhancing the sustainability and educational impact of OER initiatives. The useful output of the integration of OER into language education contributes to greater openness, equity, and innovation, which guarantee development and lifelong learning. Future empirical research should further investigate the effect of OER on learner achievement, teacher professional growth, and the advancement of open pedagogical practices in multilingual and multicultural settings.

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