Open Educational Resources in Teacher Preparation Programs: Teacher Candidates’ Perceptions of Open Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine whether the use of open educational resources (OER) in teacher preparation programs impacts the perception of the resource. P-12 schools are beginning to adopt OER; however, many teachers are unfamiliar with OER, which may slow diffusion throughout the institution. In this study, two groups of teacher candidates from two universities completed surveys evaluating their perceptions of OER. The first group used an open textbook in their course. The second group had no experience using OER. Results indicate that teacher candidates who used the open textbook perceived OER more positively and were more likely to want to use OER in their future classrooms. The results suggest that incorporating OER into courses during teacher preparation programs not only better prepares teacher candidates for using the resources after graduation, but also increases progression through the adoption process described in the diffusion of innovation theory.

KEYWORDS

#GoOpen, College of Education, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, Higher Education, Perceptions, Rogers, Teacher Preparation

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks and other curriculum materials make up a significant portion of educational costs to students in higher education as well as P-12 schools. Educators are exploring different types of open educational resources (OER) as a way of reducing the costs associated with textbooks in higher education and are now beginning to be studied in the P-12 context as well. OER are educational materials that are available at no to low cost and published under open copyright licenses or in the public domain. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “The definition of OER most often used is ‘digitized materials freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning, and research’” (2007, p. 2). OER have the potential to reduce student expenses greatly, which could be especially appealing to underprivileged populations. OER have received considerable attention in higher education (Baker, 2006; Baker, 2008; Baker, et al. 2009; Hilton, 2016; Koch, 2006) and researchers are examining the question of how students are

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perceiving open textbooks and how these textbooks affect student learning (Frith, 2009). Petrides et al. (2011) examined how using an open textbook affects teacher and student experience. If, in fact, free digital texts provide the same or potentially better educational experiences (Allen, Guzman-Alvarez, Smith, Gamage, Molinaro, & Larsen, 2015; Chiorescu, 2017; Grewe, & Davis, 2017; Kelly, & Rutherford, 2017; Wiley, Webb, Weston, & Tonks, 2017) than costly resources, students would benefit from saving money and improving their educational experience. The present study aims to build on this growing area of research by attempting to understand how teacher candidates in the College of Education perceive OER in terms of cost and quality.

Increased use of open educational resources (OER) such as open textbooks are being seen in both higher education and more recently P-12 contexts. This movement in P-12 learning environments can be partially attributed to the United States Department of Education’s initiative, #GoOpen, which encourages school districts across the U.S. to develop and adopt OER to replace commercially developed textbooks (United States Department of Education, n.d. a). The effort is facilitated by the Office of Educational Technology which, “develops national educational technology policy and establishes the vision for how technology can be used to transform teaching and learning and how to make everywhere, all-the-time learning possible for early learners through K-12, higher education, and adult education” (United States Department of Education, n.d. b).

The #GoOpen campaign encourages the use of open resources. School districts volunteer to #GoOpen and agree to “identify a district #GoOpen team who will work to develop a strategy for the implementation of openly-licensed educational materials, commit to replace at least one textbook with openly-licensed educational materials in the next year, and document and share their implementation process” (Office of Educational Technology). As of the writing of this manuscript, there are 92 school districts in 24 different states across the U.S. who have volunteered to #GoOpen. Not all P-12 schools that use OER are part of the #GoOpen campaign. The benefit of registering with the USDE is that schools are provided support for the implementation of OER through information given on the website and through connections with Ambassador School Districts.

The purpose of this study is to examine if exposure through use of open educational resources positively influences teacher candidates’ perception of OER. The organization of this paper consists of a brief literature review that includes the theoretical framework, the methodology used in the study, findings, and discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United State Department of Education (USDE) released regulations for teacher preparation in October of 2016. The regulations state that their focus is on, Is all of this indentation a direct quote? It is not clear:

...promoting stronger outcomes for all programs, including traditional, those providing alternative routes to certification and those provided through distance education, while giving states significant flexibility in how they measure program performance to reflect local needs and priorities. More specifically, the rules require new reporting by states—beyond the basic measures they are required to report annually under the Higher Education Act—about program effectiveness to drive continuous improvement by facilitating ongoing feedback amongst programs, prospective teachers, schools and districts, states and the public. The regulations also aim to provide better information to address the mismatch between the available teaching jobs and fields in which programs are preparing educators, and to enable districts and schools to deploy their best teachers where they are needed the most. (Key provisions of the Final Regulations)
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