



Quality in Language Learning

# Implementation of Digital Language Learning Opportunities in Higher Education

*Guidelines for Good Practice*





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## **Title**

Implementation of Digital Language Learning Opportunities in Higher Education. Guidelines for Good Practice

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## CHAPTER TWO

### QUILL QUALITY CRITERIA AND QUALITY INDICATORS IN OER-INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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#### ABSTRACT

*The wide application of Open Educational Resources entails the necessity to partly reconsider and fine-tune the conventional views on quality criteria and quality indicators in language teaching/learning in tertiary education. Reflecting on the complexity of quality issues in “open” education and in OERs–integrated language courses, we focus on the main products of Quill – the OER database and Teacher Training e-package, which presumably comply with quality requirements. To verify our assumption, two surveys were conducted. Language lecturers and students from higher educational institutions of the Republic of Lithuania were introduced to the QuILL outputs, tested them in practice and shared their experience while completing two questionnaires. The analysis of the collected responses provides valuable data on teachers’ and learners’ satisfaction, which is indispensable in striving for quality.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of quality of teaching and learning has been examined extensively from various perspectives, every innovation in teaching/learning environments and/or tools brings about the need to review and to fine-tune the well-established approaches and practices. Open Educational Resources (OERs) and their integration in university language courses pose new questions and raise concerns with all the stakeholders; quite a few of which are directly related to the level of quality assurance. This section is concerned with quality and its assessment within the Quality in Language Learning (QuILL) framework QuILL framework and its products, viz., a database of OERs and a teacher training package. We begin by a brief overview of how education came to be perceived through multi-dimensional quality criteria, and reflect upon the complexity of quality in teaching/learning. Moving to OERs, we seek to focus on “openness” and the changes that it entails. Then we relate the common quality criteria to the ones proposed in the description of the QuILL database.

Adopting the view that quality of a resource is intrinsically related to the learners’ progress, we have conducted two studies. In our first study, we consider the teachers’ perception of the usability of the OERs collected by QuILL. Our second study is a pilot study, in which we examine the feedback on the database provided by the learners. The main aim of both studies is to investigate teachers’ and students’ reaction to OER-integrated language courses at a university. We hope that the collected responses may be useful in developing a framework of indicators measuring the effectiveness of such courses.

#### 2. QUALITY IN EDUCATION THROUGH A HISTORICAL LENS

In order to formulate what quality criteria and quality indicators may be reasonably posed for OER-integrated language learning, the concept of quality in education will be briefly presented through a historical lens. In what follows, we largely draw on the perspectives developed by Heyworth (2013). In his extensive overview, Heyworth views quality in education as both inextricably related to and

significantly different from its original conception, viz., quality as a phenomenon developed in and conceived for – specifically – the industrial world.

In the industrial world, the notion of quality was first raised as a control mechanism, necessary to enable step-by-step assurance of the compliance with the manufacturing process. To operationalise the concept of management of quality, it was brought to comprise four stages: planning, implementation, checking, and follow-up actions, the latter either of remedial nature, or designed to implement the entire cycle of quality control at a broader scale.

The transfer of quality management to education was not simple, namely because the kind of services provided within the education industry is very different from those of the industrial world: there is no physically palpable commodity produced. Second, the notion of the client as service recipient is far less clearly defined, comprising, but not necessarily limited to:

- a) the one who actually commissions and pays for the services (i.e., education) – and thus ranges from the authorities to parents to learners;
- b) the one who receives the services (e.g., the learner); and
- c) the one who gets (in)directly affected by the service provided, without necessarily being aware of this fact.

Considerations of many other factors, such as a) interconnectedness within the provision of educational services inside an organisation, whereby its members become both service recipients and service providers, b) accountability of the ultimate service recipient to the service provider in exchange for their expectations for satisfaction, c) questioning the very notion of the applicability of quality management within public educational institutions, given that the latter are not commercial bodies trading in education (even though the latter criterion seems to have become rather limited due to e.g., paid admissions), have also been voiced. The latter factor of quality management in the education sphere in particular has to do with the broader issue of how productive and efficient an educational institution should be.

If quality of education is to be perceived through the lens of client satisfaction, the scale of clients listed above also implies the intricacy of quality measurements. In a very simplified form, the immediate client (learner) may have specific short-term goals, which may or may not coincide with the longer-term goals of stakeholders involved in the educational process, in which some may not even envisage themselves as participants of the learning process.

With respect to language education, Heyworth argues that quality considerations are to be formulated at the micro- and macro- levels. At the micro-level, these concern formulating, enacting, and evaluating proper teaching practices. At the macro-level, teaching practice is to be viewed in light of its contribution to broader dimensions of “individual educational development” on the one hand, and “the social and developmental aims of [the] educational environment” (Heyworth, 2013, p. 286), on the other.

### **3. OPENNESS IN EDUCATION, AND WHAT IT ENTAILS**

With all the complexity of a conventional educational framework, quality management and quality assurance become still more intricate when using open educational resources.

Open educational resources have irreversibly opened up education and precipitated radical changes in practice and mindsets of all the stakeholders. The importance of “openness” in education is confirmed in the Recommendation on OER, adopted by UNESCO’s General Conference at its 40th session on 25 November 2019 (<https://www.unesco.org>).

Further steps in the opening of education have brought about MOOCs with new concerns about quality assurance and new approaches to quality indicators, with specific focus on the given learning situation as well as the core stakeholders involved (Hayes, 2015; Macleod et al., 2015) and on investigating learners’ intentions and goals (Henderikx, Kreijns, & Kalz, 2017; Stracke et al., 2018; Stracke & Tan, 2018)).

The Quality Reference Framework for the Quality of MOOCs (European Alliance for the Quality of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), <http://mooc-quality.eu/qrf>) presents valuable insights into quality criteria and quality indicators of lower-scale OER-integrated courses, such as LSP language courses offered to university students.

The concept of an open educational resource *per se* could have many interpretations since “open” in an OER refers to a continuous, not binary construct (Wiley, 2009) and we, the teachers, measure the openness of content in terms of the rights we, as the users of the content, are granted. Wiley (2009) proposes the 5Rs Framework which stands for the most important rights of a user, such as:

**Retain** - the right to make, own, and control copies of the content (e.g., download, duplicate, store, and manage).

**Reuse** - the right to use the content in a wide range of ways (e.g., in a class, in a study group, on a website, in a video).

**Revise** - the right to adapt, adjust, modify, or alter the content itself (e.g., translate the content into another language).

**Remix** - the right to combine the original or revised content with other material to create something new (e.g., incorporate the content into a mashup)

**Redistribute** - the right to share copies of the original content, your revisions, or your remixes with others (e.g., give a copy of the content to a friend).

While reviewing the list of the aforementioned rights, Connell and Connell (2020, p. 4) admit that “The more the rights attached to a resource or a repository meet the 5Rs, the more it can be judged to be “open”. In this way, the researchers consider the 5Rs to serve as the background, against which quality in relationship to a given OER is to be explored.

#### 4. QUALITY CRITERIA APPLIED IN THE QUILL DATABASE OF OERS

According to Wiley (2015), the quality of an educational resource depends upon how much it supports the learning process. While it is hardly possible to give a clear characterisation of the mindset of the original creator of an OER resource or that of its end user, an area where some more clearcut quality expectations may be set is the middle ground, a mediator, which in the context of the present discussion is represented by Quality in Language Learning (hereinafter QuILL) initiative. As a *mediator*, QuILL has aimed to create a database of OERs, bringing them together from various parts of the World Wide Web (WWW) in a single repository, while verifying their selection through an internal set of criteria, as well as by testing it with fellow teachers and students. This multi-layered mediation of OERs within QuILL and the associated quality considerations form the methodological premise for the discussion below.

In the case of QuILL, the mediator is collective: it is constituted by the compilers of the QuILL database of OERs, including the administrative and managerial body, who have envisioned the conceptual architecture of the present database, and the dedicated teams, who have been implementing this endeavour. Developing a database of OERs, QuILL teams, as mediators, critically assess each resource, thereby providing a round of quality assurance mechanism, at the stage following the creation of an OER by its original authors. The significance of the mediator as a quality assurance mechanism resonates with a perspective by Connell and Connell (2020, p. 8): “in looking at quality with respect to OER, we should think of 'quality-before-the-fact' as well as 'quality-after-the-fact': that is, both while an OER is being considered for use by the teacher and during the assessment of the learners' progress.

As one of the primary objectives of QuILL is to create a database of OERs for language learning and teaching, let us thus consider the basic qualities and characteristics of the selected OERs.

The quality criteria for the resources presented in the QuILL database here may be viewed as ensuring their state of being “fit for purpose”, to use another notion Heyworth (2013, p. 284) adopts in his discussion as a criterion for quality management in education. To be fit for purpose in education means

for an educational institution to satisfy client expectations. Fitness for purposes may be further broken down into the following components (Heyworth, 2013, p. 287):

**Purpose** – Why are we undertaking this activity? Is the purpose a ‘fit’ purpose?

**Description** – What is the nature of the thing we are talking about? What kind of thing is it?

**Comparison** – What are ‘good’ instances of the subject? What is ‘good practice’ in a particular activity? What criteria do we use for this?

**Evaluation** – How good an example of its kind is it? How does it compare with set standards?

**Management** – What can we do to ensure that quality is maintained? How can we make it better? What standards do we apply to this?

**Guarantees** – How do we know we can rely on the quality of a particular thing or activity? How can it be reliably accredited? By whom?

The components listed above are presented as general guidance; yet these premises have been at the core of the development of quality guidelines throughout QuILL project. We elaborate on that below. In the context of OERs, we view fitness for purpose as meeting a number of criteria by a given OER to be considered appropriate so as to be stored in the database of OER resources within QuILL project.

The criteria posited for an OER originate at least at two levels, which are as follows:

- **The initial, “internal” criteria**, which served as guidelines for the original authors in the very development of the resources;
- **The “external” criteria**, developed by the participants of the QuILL project on the basis of the goals of the project. Although following a rigorous verification procedure, which has been jointly developed and approved by all QuILL teams, the practical application of these external criteria varies somewhat with respect to the specific team and primarily due to target languages, bearing in mind the unequal availability of the OERs and consequently, underrepresented languages with limited OERs available.

Incorporating both the internal and the external compilers of a given selection of OERs, the proposed criteria comprise the following:

**Visible planning of the resource** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Clarity of aims of the resource** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Clarity of stages** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Variety of tasks** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Appropriateness of the material** to the level of the prospective learner – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Range of skills practiced** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Clear explanations** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team;

**Attention to individual learner needs** – as perceived by the original authors and by the relevant QuILL team.

## 5. QUALITY INDICATORS IN AN OER-INTEGRATED LANGUAGE COURSE

Quality indicators concern the most immediate end users, i.e., learners themselves, but also the instructors, potentially incorporating a given resource into their work. Within the framework of QuILL, quality indicators are viewed as a means to measure the progress of digital based language teaching courses in the Higher Education framework; as such, they may incorporate traditional accountability tools, results in examinations and standardised tests.

Importantly, due to the apparent properties of OERs, the users’ perspectives gain additional weight in assessing the progress in a language course. QuILL strategy was to ensure that all stakeholders involved in the project respond to the OERs from the user perspective, whether it be the teacher or the student (recall a perspective on the interconnectedness of the participants within an educational organisation).



Consequently, the proposed and most immediately observable quality indicators for OERs integrated language courses comprise the following:

Teacher satisfaction in questionnaires (as assessed by the respondents in the framework of the QuILL project);

Student satisfaction in questionnaires (as assessed by the respondents in the framework of the QuILL project).

## **6. STUDY ONE: LANGUAGE TEACHERS' SATISFACTION WITH OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

To discover the Lithuanian teachers' satisfaction level with the application of OERs in their language classes an online survey was conducted in the period of 15-25 November 2022. Prior to the survey, the participants were introduced to the QuILL project outputs: the Database of Teaching Resources and e-Training Package available on the project website. The latter outcome was also exploited as a training tool, and was of great use, especially to those who have never applied an OER in their language classes. The participants of the training session were taught how to select, integrate or create OERs of their own into the subject syllabus.

After the training session, the participants were encouraged to explore the QuILL database, apply the most suitable OERs to their language classes (according to the reviewed set of criteria), express their opinion on the outcomes as well as to share their expertise while answering the questions of the questionnaire published both in English (available at: <https://forms.office.com/r/1AhQiFpEh4>) and Lithuanian (available at: <https://forms.office.com/r/M1ALPb61Gk>). The questionnaire comprised mainly multiple choice and some open-ended questions.

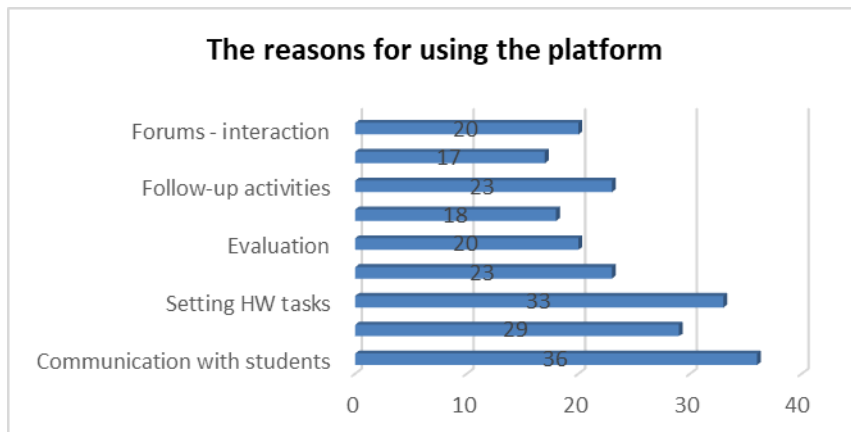
The sample size of the respondents encompassed 43 participants representing 23 language lecturers teaching Lithuanian, English, French, Spanish, German, Polish, Latvian, Estonian at different universities and other institutions of higher education in the Republic of Lithuania, 17 language teachers working at public or private secondary schools and gymnasias of the state, and three language policy makers having part-time jobs in the area of education.

General characteristics of the survey participants revealed that the biggest part of the respondents (23) had been teaching languages for more than 15/16 years, the teaching experience of the second biggest group of the respondents varied from one to five years. 26 respondents claimed that the last time they had attended professional development courses on digital teaching was within the last six months, and it was within the last year when the rest of the participants had updated their digital competence. Furthermore, the respondents have been active members of many professional associations and special interest groups or research fields, ready to spread their knowledge and expertise with their colleagues.

While reviewing the teaching contexts of the surveyed participants it has to be stressed that just seven participants claimed not having used any teaching platform in their institutions, the rest admitted that both Microsoft Teams (mentioned by 32 respondents) and Moodle (mentioned by 28 respondents) happened to be their everyday companions for a language class. Further to it, seven respondents mentioned the application of Google Classroom and one of Canvas LMS to language teaching.

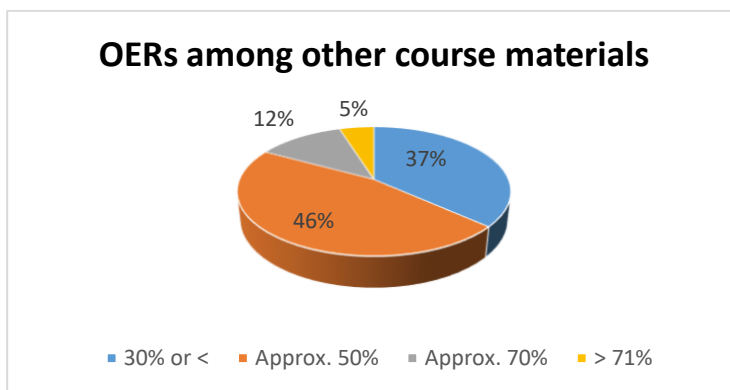
When asked to identify the reasons what the learning platforms were used for, first of all, the majority of the language teachers stressed a multifaceted value of the learning platform. Nevertheless, the display of the answers in Figure 1 demonstrates that the priority was given to such aspects of the teaching process as 'facilitating communication with students' (36 respondents), 'setting homework tasks' (33 respondents) and 'sharing OERs' (29 respondents). In general, the latter number suggests that application of OERs in language teaching/learning process does not fall outside. On the contrary, it supports the evidence of their frequent use by the language teachers.

**Figure 1**  
*The reasons for using the learning platform*



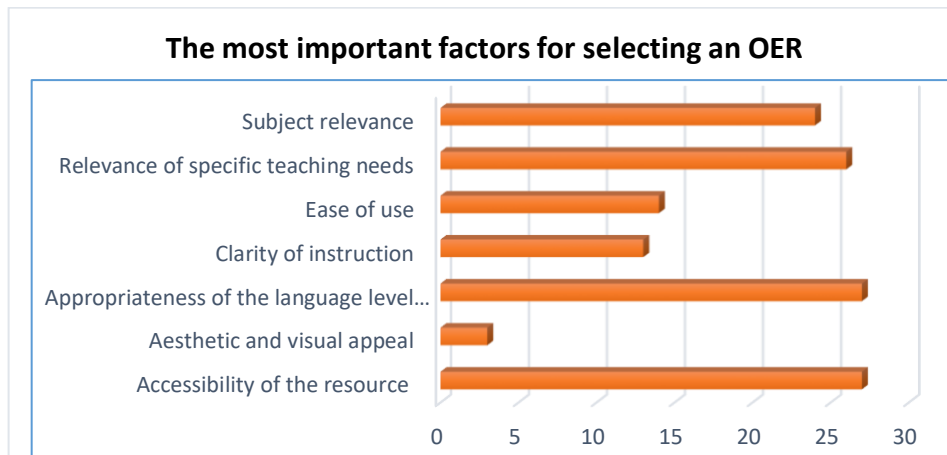
When asked to indicate the approximate percentage that OERs may take place among other course materials, as recommended by the study programme (see Fig. 2), nearly half of the respondents (46%) claimed that they could cover approximately 50% of the course materials. 12% of the language teachers were for giving OERs even wider space in the course, of approximately 70%, and it was 5% of the respondents who intended to expand the usage of OERs even more than 71%. On the other hand, 37% of the language teachers were more moderate than their colleagues and admitted that 30% of OERs was enough among all the course materials.

**Figure 2**  
*OERs among other course materials*



The data provided in Figure 2 encouraged further investigation into the pathways of selecting and taking responsibility for an OER. The respondents maintained that mainly the teachers themselves had a right to decide what to use (30 teachers) in their language classes. Just in two cases, either administration or Committee members of the study programme were responsible for the selection of teaching materials. Further to it, in nine institutions, OERs have to be formally approved either always or in most cases. In contrast, 35 respondents claimed that they were allowed to take decisions themselves, and successful integration of OERs in Language for Specific Purposes curricula highly depended on both the methodological decisions of the teaching staff (30 respondents) and availability of teaching resources (21 respondents). Figure 3 presents a list of the most important factors that make language teachers reach decisions while selecting OERs:

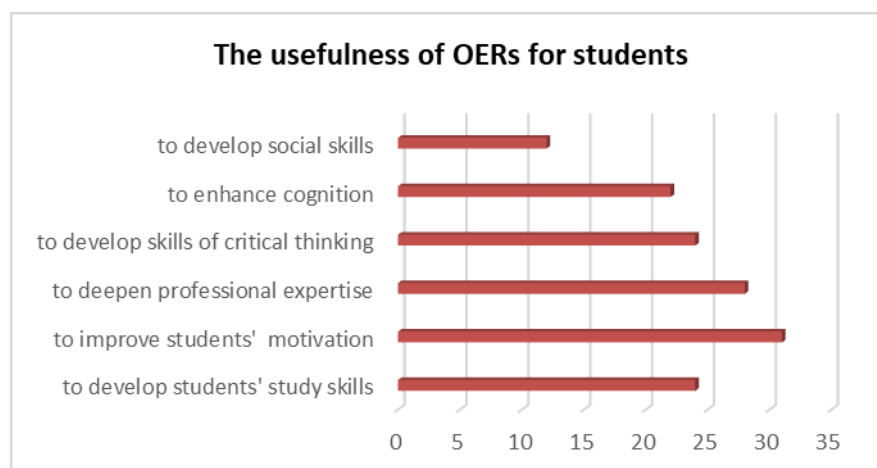
**Figure 3**  
*The most important factors for selecting an OER*



As seen in Figure 3, the teachers took into consideration accessibility of the resource as well as its appropriateness to learners' language level difficulty (27 respondents, respectively). They also paid attention to the resource's relevance to specific teaching needs, i.e., skills they intended to target or develop (26 respondents). And the fourth key factor chosen by the respondents appeared to be the resource's suitability to the subject (24 respondents). Although such factors as the resource's 'ease of use' or 'clarity of instruction' were pointed out just by the third of the respondents, they remained to be significant and often mattered while selecting an OER.

Further to the factors describing technical characteristics and content relevance of an OER, it is the target learner whom the resource is meant to. Therefore, we also aimed at eliciting teachers' attitudes toward a list of factors related to the usefulness of OERs for students.

**Figure 4**  
*The usefulness of OERs for students (according to language teachers)*



As it was expected, the respondents' priority had been given to OER's magic characteristic to generate students' motivation (31 answers). According to the language teachers, they (OERs) also inspired students to deepen their expertise (28 answers), encouraged them to develop both their study skills and critical thinking skills (24 answers, respectively). Fewer respondents (22) thought that OERs could enhance students' cognition and develop their social skills (12 answers). It is important to note that nearly all the respondents (38) admitted the presence of the power in an OER, which could be explored

to meet each individual student's needs. This consequently proved that the current status of available OERs had been seen in a very positive light.

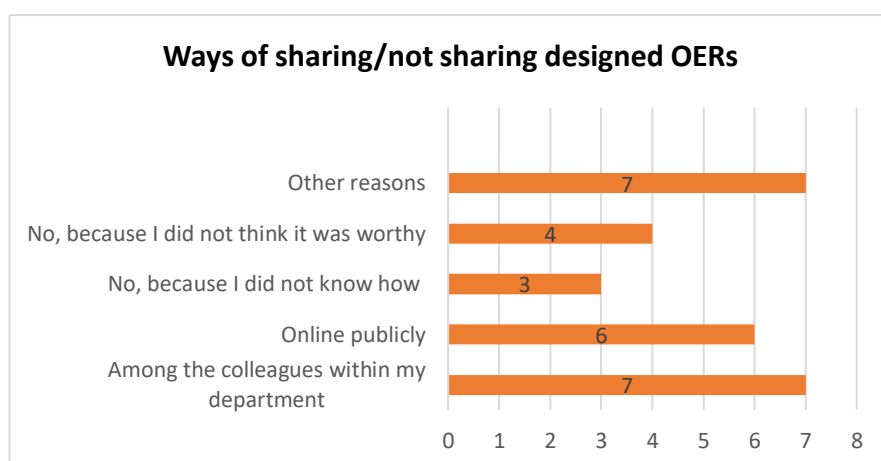
## 7. THE USE OF OERs THROUGH THE 5RS FRAMEWORK (AFTER WILEY (2009))

To explore the *status quo* of OERs through the perspective of the 5Rs Framework proposed by Wiley (as cited in Connell & Connell, 2020) in language teaching at the institutions of higher and secondary education of Lithuania, a number of the survey questions addressed that issue.

First, 30 respondents out of 43 admitted that they had been adapting or remixing freely available resources to their particular teaching needs; however, when asked whether they checked the existing copyright regulations, the provided answers grouped the respondents into those who either always or often checked the regulations (60%) and those (40%) who rarely or never took such an important matter into consideration. The reason to justify such a high percentage of teachers, who neglect copyrights, could be an assumption that they have been just in the initial steps of attaching the rights to the chosen resources.

Second, the survey disclosed 20 respondents who had already designed OERs of their own. Further exploration into the ways they shared the created OERs or the reasons why they did not want to share their outputs can be seen in Figure 5:

**Figure 5**  
*The ways of sharing/not sharing the designed OERs*



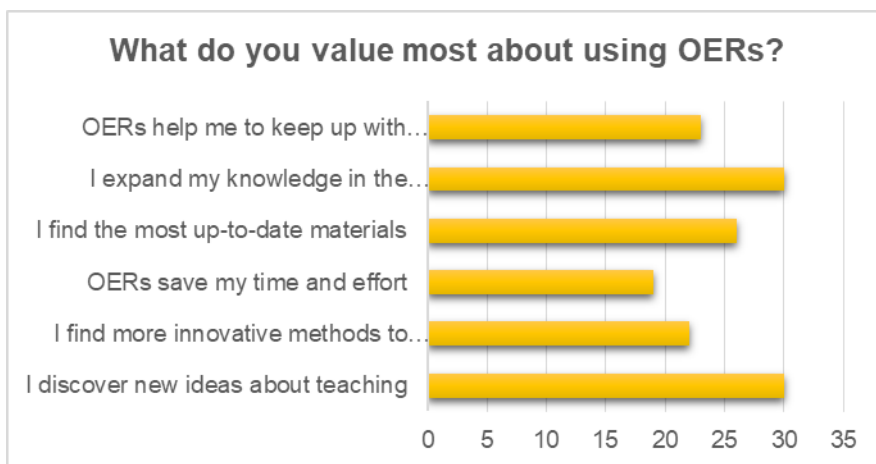
13 respondents admitted having shared the OERs designed by themselves either online publicly (6) or among the colleagues working in the same department (7). The rest acknowledged having some experience in creating outputs though their OERs had never reached a wider public due to their modesty (4), digital illiteracy (3) or some other reasons.

Delving into the list of problems the teachers were facing while designing their own OERs, one can find “the shortage of time” as the major problem for the respondents. Due to it there appeared many subsequent reasons: “You get stuck in the simplest things, then you get nervous, reject your idea for a while, which means for good”. Poor digital skills were the second major reason preventing teachers from creative tasks: “In order to design you should be familiar with the rules of design. I’m not saying that I have not tried, I did many times. However, whenever I started, I always confronted with some technical obstacles”. Thirdly, that always nagging feeling of inferiority: “I cannot compete with the beautifully designed materials” could be a discouraging factor that blocked teachers’ willingness to create. However, not all the answers were negative. Some positive attitudes towards designing an OER like “It took me quite a long time to design a handout. In the beginning, it looked simple and unattractive. But it worked: it was very useful for my students. I forgot about its visual drawbacks

instantly: the longer I used it the more attractive it seemed to me” proves the fact that the road to success comes through hard work and dedication, and it is the teachers who manage the quality of language teaching themselves.

The review of the respondents’ answers regarding the problems related to OERs design allowed us to infer that although there was teachers’ potential and willingness, the absence of common policy at national and local levels made the current status of the application of 5Rs framework quite unbalanced. The respondents’ answers to the question “What they value most about using OERs”, makes us believe that such a situation is just temporal and its improvement is just a matter of time.

**Figure 6**  
*What do you value most about using OERs?*



In Figure 6, one can see that the language teachers are certain about the value of OERs as a methodological tool: OERs expand their knowledge in the subject (30 answers) and provide new ideas about teaching (30 answers). OERs for them are the sources of the most up-to-date materials (26 answers), help them keep up with modern trends in education (23 answers), and save time and effort (19 answers). And finally, it is the OERs that bring innovative methods for them to deliver material, and in such a way, they update their didactic competences.

Having explored the survey respondents’ answers it can be stated that although the current use of OERs in language teaching has reached the 3Rs stage in the country, the teachers are willing not only to select and integrate the available OERs into their lessons but also are full of ideas to dive into the stage of designing their own OERs.

## **8. STUDY TWO (A PILOT STUDY): LANGUAGE LEARNERS’/STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS OER**

In order to build up a more complete picture of the perception of good quality OERs, it is necessary to involve the learners for whom the resources have been designed. In order to ascertain a sample of students’ perspectives, undergraduates (aged 21-23) on the ‘English and Another Foreign Language’ (French, Russian, or Spanish) Bachelor’s programme at Vilnius University were also invited to take part in a pilot project.

The project comprised two stages:

- In the first stage, the project participants were encouraged to explore the QuILL database as part of their autonomous studies and find three interesting OERs. They then conducted a quick analysis on what makes a good OER, and what issues they faced when accessing what they identified as a less useful OER (e.g., dead links, incomplete instructions, etc.).

- In the second stage, the students had to create their own digital revision tools and provide their input through a questionnaire (available at [shorturl.at/bEKMZ](http://shorturl.at/bEKMZ)) designed to examine their attitudes towards using OERs and digital tools.

18 respondents completed the questionnaire, 14 of whom were able to identify what OERs are from a list of four options. It should be acknowledged that the students had been encouraged to visit the QuILL database of teaching and learning resources as part of their autonomous learning. They were also involved in a project to create their own digital revision tools. Sixteen respondents had already used OERs and the following digital tools and apps were familiar to students in response to an open question: “ReWord, Duolingo, Busuu, Drops, Quizlet, YouTube, podcasts”. Only one student said they had not been on a language course in which OERs had been used. Those courses that integrated OERs into the course content were rated positively; however, the students noted a number of drawbacks or potentially demotivating problems. In response to an open question about problems that may arise when using OERs, the responses included: “Some people might not like specific types of OERs which can make them less motivated”. Other comments related to the content of OERs included: “wrong CEFR level”, “low quality content”, “out-of-date information”, and “too much information and then you can’t structure the most important materials”. One student criticised the lexis for being inappropriate to the context, or the resource lacking “...creativity or spoken language lexis”. One comment on content concerned inappropriate resources or mislabeled levels (too high or low on the CEFR scale according to the students), although one might question their ability to adequately evaluate this.

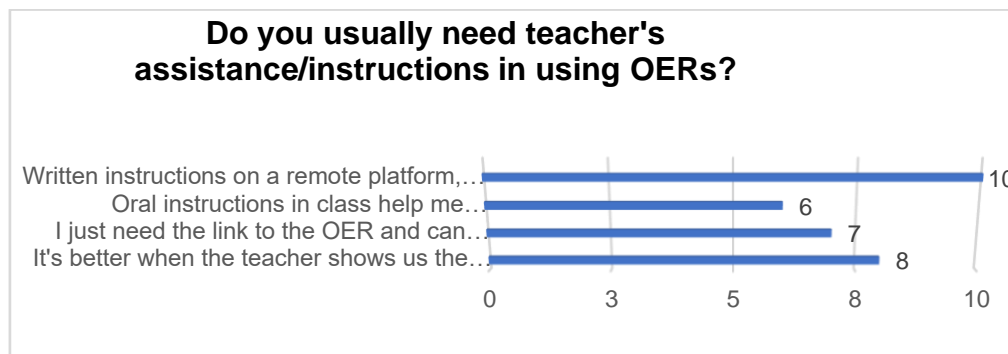
Three students identified lack of access as being an issue. Sometimes lecturers had recommended sites with a limited-time free trial, after which students would have had to pay for the resource. Although such resources are by their very nature not OERs, they were nevertheless identified as such by the surveyed students. Another student did not feel comfortable creating an account and providing personal details, stating “If I'd need to create an account or pay anything for using that OER I'd simply ignore this task/homework”. Two students mentioned dead links or information no longer being accessible. Some commented related to design and layout – “Complicated design (to the point, where you don’t know what button does what)” and technical issues were frequently mentioned, including internet connection problems, running out of mobile data. Of course, these diverse comments reflect the diverse nature of OERs.

Six respondents said they could envisage a good language course without OERs, while twice this number said OERs were necessary on a quality course. When asked in an open question what skills they thought OERs had helped them develop, the responses were similar. Three students highlighted improved interactivity compared to traditional learning using a course book. One student wrote “Interactivity; the ability to switch from boring textbooks to interesting videos, podcasts, games and exercises”. Listening comprehension was identified eight times, while five students reflected that they had improved their reading comprehension skills through OERs. Eight students mentioned OERs being helpful in assisting their vocabulary acquisition (“I think lexis is easiest to learn with OERs as there are different ways to present it”); other skills identified were creativity, IT skills, memory skills, speaking ability, concentration, grammar, and the ability to visually learn new concepts (through videos). Other benefits for students included “phonetics, hearing and learning to pronounce words. Speaking and communicating in the language that you are learning” and “maintaining interest in the subject” and “writing skills” (only mentioned by one student).

In terms of the types of support that students prefer receiving from lecturers, there was unsurprisingly no consensus as each student has individual preferences and ways of working. Some students chose all four options, indicating that the type and level of support depends on the familiarity with the task.

**Figure 7**

*Do students need teachers' instructions in using OERs?*



A key component of any learning resource is that it is motivating for the student. 44% of students reported that OERs contribute slightly to their motivation, while 33% were more positive, indicating that they improve their motivation substantially. 11% said that OERs have a minor impact on their levels of motivation for language learning.

When asked to identify what makes a resource attractive and 'good', the students identified the following features (in an open question): the source is deemed to be appealing and interesting if it has visual input (photos, videos) and is "easy to use, clear, short instructions, no long paragraphs, more visuals than text". If there is a transcript, a video or podcast is easier to follow and students can read and listen/watch at the same time, which can help with pronunciation. Pictures help to provide clarity and help with learning vocabulary because it is easier to memorise the lexis. As online tasks can be interactive, multiple choice tasks with feedback were mentioned as a positive, as well as elements of gamification, such as winning points and getting feedback. "It's also the rewarding part, when you answer a question you get a message saying good job, or if you fail it says something encouraging". The wide variety of available resources was identified as a positive feature, as was maintaining the students' interest due to resources being "pleasant to scroll through and it does not get boring that easily, compared to workbooks". The variety of task types also appeared to be important to students ("there are different creative variations that encourage you to learn"), as was the immediate feedback or elements of progression "when it checks what do you have learned".

The sampled students concluded that a high-quality OER should be easy to use, accessible, with clear audio and good quality video; it should be well-written and contain reliable and up-to-date information. There should be some clear instructions and have some follow-up exercises in the form of interesting tasks. Some kind of incentive system of rewards or levels was identified as a bonus. It should be freely accessible, including on smaller screens or mobiles and all the links should work and be active. The design should be attractive and it should be adaptable.

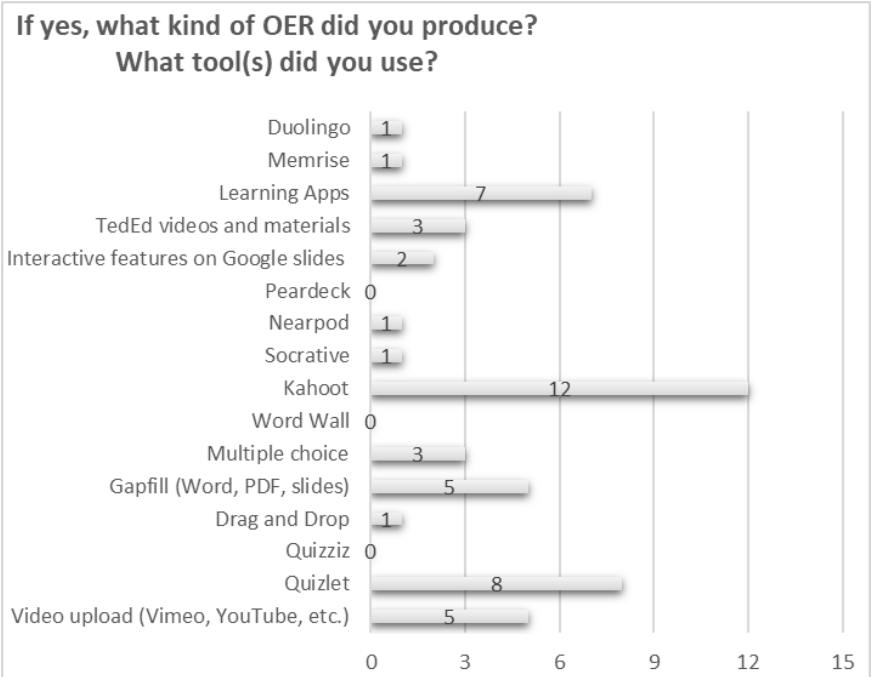
One of the more specific questions for students concerned whether OERs could replace educational professionals. The students were then invited to justify their responses, which only three students declined to do.

Many students mentioned motivation: "I think certain topics and aspects of a language need the help of a teacher. Moreover, I simply couldn't learn a new language just by using OERs, since I wouldn't have that much motivation", whereas another student believes it depends on the person, so "if a person is motivated enough he does not necessarily need a teacher". Other students identified that "it is possible for people to learn something on their own, using the high-quality resources" and "information these days is so easily available and there are millions of good sources"; there were some other comments on the lack of reliability of OERs and how they would trust the information provided by a lecturer more readily than an online resource ("I cannot blindly trust an OER"). Teachers were also

identified as being a source of help or “a guide” and to provide reliable explanations; interactivity within the classroom and access to a trainer were named as the benefits of learning with a teacher. A few comments related to the efficiency and speed of learning a language: “you still need a live communication to improve your skills even more” [sic] and “we learn faster in discussions and dialogues”. One respondent emphatically wrote, “Nobody or anything can substitute the teacher”. So, despite having experienced online teaching and understanding the benefits of accessing a plethora of resources online, the majority of the surveyed students still see the need for a teacher.

Other questions in the survey related to the students creating their own OERs, which is the epitome of autonomous learners. As part of their project work on their English Lexis course, the students were encouraged to create their own OERs. They also did this to highlight lexical chunks after making oral presentations on a variety of topics. The students overwhelmingly valued the process of creating their resources, and there seemed to be an underlying sense of motivation at having created something that helped their peers to revise the course materials. Most students specially mentioned that the process of creating the mini language games had helped them to memorise the lexis and use it in context. It is important to recognise that this particular cohort of students may have been primed in their responses as the demonstrated understanding of the tasks they had been given. Their responses should not be taken as representative of the wider community of students at Vilnius University.

**Figure 8**  
*Kinds of OER produced by students*



In response to the final open question, seven students took the opportunity to add comments on their and their lecturers’ usage of OERs. There were some critical comments and some interesting insights and suggestions, such as limiting the number of tools used “so as not to get confused”. The positive comments reiterated that OERs can be motivating, particular for added learning on new topics or as a means of recapping what has been covered in class, so as a supplementary resource (“they help to keep students motivated and not bored by simply filling student book tasks”). Some students commented on the use of class time: “Just few lecturers have ever used OER or mainly it is a video source which is not very gripping, as the videos can usually be watched at home and discussed afterwards. Lecturers keep using old methodologies.”



Overall, it was encouraging that despite our flaws as lecturers, some students believe “when it comes to studies, for me there is not any substitute for a teacher”, so in order to keep our students motivated, the academic community should strive to supplement our courses with OERs by searching for and creating high-quality resources, as well as encouraging students to try their hand at creating their own as part of their own learning journey.

In summary, the student questionnaire revealed that learners themselves appear to value the same indicators of quality as educators. They also experienced technical issues accessing some materials. Their motivation varied according to the particular OER and level, but in general, students with intrinsic motivation found OERs to be useful. Many students identified that they were a welcome change from traditional course books, especially as supplementary materials that were interactive and provided feedback. The learners surveyed still saw a role for lecturers as guides; digital tools cannot simply replace them. The learners in the pilot study seemed to find creating their own resources worthwhile (in terms of learning English vocabulary) and fulfilling (developing their digital literacy).

### LINKS TO EXTERNAL RESOURCES

European Alliance for the Quality of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): <http://mooc-quality.eu/grf>

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