Researching OER adoption and impact in the Global South
– an overview of the Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D) project

DEFINITION AND PREMISE OF OER
Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under a copyright licence that permits their free use and re-purposing by others (adapted from Smith & Casserly, 2006, p. 8). They are purported to:

- Widen access to education
- Improve affordability of education through reducing textbook and course development costs
- Improve quality of learning materials through adaptation and localisation
- Increase visibility of academics’ work through sharing of materials
- Enable pedagogical innovation and student-centred learning
- Allow for more flexible modes of learning and improve learner outcomes

However, empirical research is required to establish whether, how and under what circumstances the adoption of OER impacts on the increasing demand for accessible, high-quality and affordable education in developing countries, and how this can be sustained.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE
The general objective of this research project is to improve educational policy, practice and research in developing countries by better understanding the use and impact of OER in formal education settings.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION
Whether, how, for whom and under what circumstances can the adoption of OER and/or engagement with Open Educational Practices (OEP) provide equitable access to relevant, high quality, affordable and sustainable education in the Global South?

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INITIAL FINDINGS

Awareness of OER
- According to a number of sub-project studies, OER are not understood under the terms typically used in the literature.
- Across most the studies, students and teachers in schools and universities often assume that all resources on the internet are OER as they are "free".

Creation and use of OER
- Although a few studies highlight educators' creation of OER, overall educators are like to be users rather than creators of OER.

Equitable access
- University lecturers from less economically developed countries are more likely to use OER than those from more developed countries, according to the nine-country, cross-regional survey of 295 university lecturers.
- OER use is predicated upon students and educators enjoying a certain minimum level of access to electricity and ICT infrastructure, which is more likely at universities than at schools.

Educators' pedagogical practice
- Educators often do not hold the copyright over the materials they produce (their institution does) and are therefore not legally in a position to share their teaching materials as OER.
- The creation of MOOCs as OER at the University of Cape Town influenced MOOC educators' approach to open licencing and stimulated learner oriented pedagogical practices.
- A study in three East African higher education institutions found that teacher educators reported greater confidence and competence in drawing on multiple forms of knowledge from OER and problematising what is valued knowledge.

Students' academic performance
- In a study of Chilean first- and second-year higher education students, the use of a teacher-selected collection of Khan Academy tutorials appeared to improve students' examination performance when compared to the use of the teacher-created Open Textbooks (which afforded the teachers and students the opportunity to edit the text) or the traditional textbook.

Affordability and sustainability
- A study in three East African higher education institutions found that support from library staff or instructional design colleagues who acted as a resource for practice was influential in sustaining use of OER.
- A study of three universities in South African concluded that identifying and engaging with the agent who holds legal copyright over the materials (the individual or the institution) is essential for sustaining OER practice.