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Article

Why Are We Still Asking Students to Buy Textbooks for General Education?

A Rationale for Open Educational Resources (OER) in GenEd

Natalie S. Hoskins[1]

Katie G. Gruber[2]

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Abstract

The basic public speaking course is an important general education course to majors and non-majors alike. However, students face increasing challenges related to the cost of education and materials which influence their engagement, retention, and ultimate success. Open educational resources (OER) can decrease costs and increase equitable access, yet standard textbooks remain in place for many communication departments. To garner student voices, the authors invited participants to share their feelings and opinions about textbooks as part of a larger survey study designed to measure the effectiveness of an OER pilot project. The authors collected qualitative data from a convenience sample of 275 undergraduate students enrolled in sections of the basic course. Findings indicate that students have positive attitudes towards OER and negative attitudes about textbook costs. Participants also made distinctions between the usefulness of major course materials when compared to general education course materials and that their money is better spent on their major. Based on study results, the authors present a rationale for the use of OER in general education courses.

[1] *Assistant Professor, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, United States;* [2] *Lecturer, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, United States*
E-mail: natalie.hoskins@mtsu.edu
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Introduction

The basic public speaking course has been and remains an important foundation for communication curricula and an integral course offered in general education programs. The basic course also serves as the "front porch" of the communication studies discipline, playing an important role in providing undergraduate students with skills and knowledge necessary for becoming engaged and responsible citizens (Morreale et al., 2016; Valenzano III et al., 2014). While introductory courses remain an essential piece of the general education puzzle, college tuition is up, and enrollment is down (Causey et al., 2020). With the rising costs in education exceeding increases in median family income (Perna & Odle, 2020) and the demands for innovation in a digital age (Prensky, 2012), departments offering general education courses must respond to the changing landscape.

Open educational resources (OER) represent one potential solution to the current problem of resource inequity that students face. OER are defined as "materials for teaching or learning that are either in the public domain or have been released under a license that allows them to be freely used, changed, or shared with others" (Sparks, 2017, para. 3). OER give instructors the opportunity to adapt and customize instructional materials to the individual needs of students at no cost to them. The most common way to release materials as OER is through Creative Commons copyright licenses which are customizable licenses that grant permissions for reuse under specific circumstances. Two of the greatest benefits of OER are increasing equity (Perna & Odle, 2020) and student success (Feldstein et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2015).

Our focus as teacher-scholars is to assess the benefits of OER in the basic public speaking course, which students from all majors are required to complete. Though the current study reports student opinions about purchasing or renting textbooks, the results are drawn from a larger pilot project that compared OER to the use of a standard textbook, *The Art of Public Speaking* (Lucas, 2019). Though previous research has indicated students tend to have positive attitudes toward OER (Hilton III et al., 2013; Hilton III, 2016; Jaggars et al., 2018; Lindshield & Adhikari, 2013; Watson et al., 2017), there are still some who resist transitioning away from the traditional textbook. Considering the increasing financial constraints facing students today and the advantages of OER, we investigated whether the implementation of OER is a reasonable alternative to a traditional text for our students. Based on previous research and current study results, this report advocates for the use of OER in general education courses whenever possible.

Literature Review

High College Cost & Disproportionate Impacts

The cost of college attendance is rising faster than family incomes, and increases in federal, state, and institutional grants have been insufficient to meet the financial needs of all students (Perna & Odle, 2020). Additionally, since the early 1980s, textbook and course material costs have increased at a higher rate than tuition, housing costs, and healthcare costs in the United States, with textbook prices increasing

by 1041% since 1977 (Kingkade, 2013; Popken, 2015). According to Ma and Pender (2021), the average undergraduate will spend about $1,200 on textbooks and supplies each year.

Buczynski (2007) asserts many students go without textbooks because they are unable to afford them. This contributes to "inequality in the classroom, in that some students have the required learning materials to succeed in the course while others either do not or have unreliable borrower access to the materials" (p. 170). Many studies show students delay or avoid purchasing texts altogether due to high costs (Benoit, 2018; Feldstein et al., 2012; Kempson et al., 1994; Spica, 2020). While students are *aware* of the academic consequences, they choose to delay or avoid purchasing required materials anyway (Donaldson & Shen, 2016; Nagle & Vitez, 2021). Wakefield Research reports that 85% of U.S. college students admit they have either postponed buying required materials or chosen not to buy them at all, and 50% surveyed who simply *delayed* buying textbooks had their grades suffer as a result (McKenzie, 2017). Donaldson and Shen (2016) also found that students will use various methods to ameliorate textbook costs, with nearly 47% reporting that they take fewer classes and may withdraw from courses with expensive textbooks. Additionally, Unni (2005) found that students *retained* only about 44% of their textbooks, with a majority (57%) of those books related to their major.

In addition to avoiding or delaying the costs of textbooks, students often borrow more money or work more hours to pay for textbooks and supplemental materials (Advisory Committee for Student Financial Assistance, 2007). Regrettably, working additional hours has a negative impact on students' GPA, credit accrual, and their overall enjoyment of studies (Dadgar, 2012; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2010; Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2016; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003, 2014). In contrast, students with more free time to explore outside of scheduled course times have greater opportunity to bridge gaps in their learning compared to students with low time resources (Ruggieri, 2020). Inevitably, this unequal access directly affects student learning and success. While loans, jobs, or both will help many students afford their college studies, a higher education finance system that requires the use of loans and paid employment disproportionately disadvantages individuals from groups that continue to be underrepresented in and underserved by higher education (Perna & Odle, 2020).

The Current Study

At the foundation of OER are the values of inclusivity, access, and equity. OER are "teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities [retain, reuse, revise, remix, redistribute]" (Creative Commons, 2022). In other words, OER are open and accessible to everyone freely and without restriction and are available to students without cost before, during, and after each course, which offers one solution to the problems of resource inequity that students face. High quality OER are available for basic public speaking courses, yet they are not currently the standard across most programs and institutions. The basic public speaking course, as a required general education course at most institutions, is an ideal place to implement and test OER because of its ubiquitous nature and the diversity of students who are obligated to enroll in it. The current study examines students' perceptions of requiring textbooks for purchase or rent in general education courses, such as the basic public speaking course. Thus, we address the following research question:

RQ: What are students' opinions about being required to purchase/rent textbooks for general education classes, such as public speaking?

Methods

To achieve study goals, data were collected through online surveys during fall semester 2021. The survey was distributed at the beginning of the semester to gather student perspectives about required course textbooks. All methods and procedures for this study were approved by the Office of Research Compliance.

Study Setting

The Department of Communication Studies at our institution serves approximately 1,600 students per semester (per enrollment numbers for spring 2021) through our basic public speaking course. This is the sixth most predictive course for student graduation and the general education course with the highest enrollment of all predictive courses across an 8-year period, according to the office of the Vice Provost for Student Success. This course serves approximately 3,000 students each academic year across over 130 sections. Our department policy requires instructors of the basic course use *The Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen Lucas, now in its 13th edition, oft-cited by two-year and four-year institutions across the U.S. as the standard (Morreale et al., 2016). Yet, textbook costs in Tennessee are higher than the national average at approximately $1,500 per student annually, and approximately 40% of our students come from low-income families (i.e., Pell eligible), putting them at a disadvantage when compared to students who are more financially stable (Spica, 2020). With the financial health and academic success of our students in mind, the authors of the current study designed a pilot project in fall 2021 to test the implementation of OER in 11 sections of general education public speaking as a part of an OER grant opportunity. Data for this report are drawn from a larger analysis of our OER implementation.

Design and Participants

A recruitment email was sent to 651 students enrolled in public speaking courses during the second week of the fall semester. Students were offered up to one percent of their overall course grade (five points, in most cases) as compensation for participation. Students were given two weeks to complete each questionnaire. A convenience sample of 275 undergraduate students enrolled in public speaking within the Department of Communication Studies was included in this portion of the study. Demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	***n***	**%**

Gender		
Female	175	62.3
Male	87	31
Nonbinary	5	1.8
Other	2	.7
Year in School		
1st Year	75	26.7
Sophomore	133	47.3
Junior	52	18.5
Senior	14	5.0
1st Generation	96	34.2
Transfer Student	66	23.5
Race/Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	182	64.8
Black/African American	39	13.9
Hispanic or Latino	17	6.0
Asian	13	4.6

Two or More Races	11	3.9
Household Income		
Under $25,000	51	18.1
$25,000 to $49,999	69	24.6
$50,000 to $74,999	54	19.2
$75,000 to $99,999	36	12.8
$100,000 or over	50	17.8

Survey Measures

The qualitative portion of the larger online survey was designed to gauge students' opinions about being required to purchase or rent standard textbooks. All participants responded to two open-ended questions in the following prompt: *How do you feel when a college course requires you to purchase or rent a textbook? We are interested in your opinions related to general education and major degree courses. Is there any difference, in your opinion, when a textbook is required in a gen-ed course compared to when it is required in a major degree course? Please explain.*

Data Analysis

To analyze the open-ended responses, data from Qualtrics were downloaded into a Word document, which amounted to 25 single-spaced pages. Each author read through the data set separately and engaged in open coding, noting potential themes and concepts. Then, authors met to compare themes and develop a codebook. The codebook included a description of the code and exemplar phrases. Example themes, codes, and quotes from the codebook are shown in Table 2. The codebook helped to develop specific categories in which the authors organized and re-organized the codes to help understand the phenomena (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Differences in opinion between coders were reconciled through discussion and review of participants' language and meaning.

Table 2

Themes, Codes, and Example Quotes

Theme	Codes/Phrases	Example Quotes
Concerns about cost	Would look for free version Would look for the cheapest option Would have trouble spending over $20 Okay if able to rent for less than $35 Sad about money Spending more money is bad Not thrilled because of cost Waste of money Wants to save money Extra stress due to financial constraints	"I would not like it, especially for a class like this. I would rather have the teacher explain public speaking to me than have to read and try to comprehend them from a textbook. It just seems like a waste of money."
Concerns about usefulness	Not all content is critical Okay if relevant Okay if used Only used for a semester Texts are not used Don't see the point Won't be using after course	"I probably wouldn't buy it because most of the time when they require you to purchase a textbook, it's not actually used that much."
Greater perceived value in major course textbooks	Upset because not major Prefers not to buy for gen-ed Gen-ed should be optional Will use info for major Will use info for career	"I feel like for gen-ed courses I'll never need to pick up the book again because it doesn't really matter for my major and most likely could be something I could look up on the internet. Whereas for major degree courses, it feels like at the very least

More willing to pay extra for major	I could use this book for my future career.”
Major book used in multiple classes	
Gen-ed not applicable to later life	
Rent for gen-ed, buy for major	
Gen-eds are boring and irrelevant	

Study Results

Recall that the study research question aimed to capture student opinions about purchasing course textbooks. Two hundred seventy-five participants responded to the question, “How do you feel when a college course requires you to purchase or rent a textbook?” Only six participants (2%) expressed a preference for hard copies. Eye strain, note taking, and college norms were the reasons provided. For example, one student stated, “I would have preferred a text of some sort. Purchasing the book is just part of it.” Otherwise, the vast majority stated a preference for no-cost alternatives such as OER. When asked how they feel about courses that required them to buy or rent textbooks, participants predominantly responded with negativity. Students tended to describe their feelings with words like, “anxious,” “stressed,” “nervous,” and “overwhelmed.” Reflecting many participants’ responses, one student said, “I am hit with a wave of dread after I’ve found all of my assigned textbooks and placed them in an online shopping cart.” Another student wrote that they tend to be “overwhelmed because [they] may not have the funds for it right now.” In addition to negative feelings, three additional themes were identified: concerns about cost, concerns about usefulness, and greater perceived value for major textbooks.

Concerns about Cost

Most students complained of financial constraints, noting, “I hate when I have to purchase a textbook, I am broke and am already having to struggle along with my money so buying textbooks makes it worse.” Another student wrote, “college is already so expensive, and all these extra book fees are irritating.” The outrage can be inferred from many responses. For example, one participant stated,

> I really REALLY do not like when we have to purchase a book for a class that we already pay for. Just adding one more thing to buy really hurts and honestly hinders advancement in future classes because we have to spend so much money on books that it takes more money out of our pockets to pay for future classes!

The implication that students must wait to take future classes to pay for their current expenses is a point echoed from the extant literature—students must drop courses or lower their total hours to afford the expense (Donaldson & Shen, 2016).

One student commented, “Seems like the start of every semester is just a further drain on money that I am already spending to attend classes.” Another student connected the concern for cost with the

negative feelings saying, “It is an additional financial burden that makes the first few weeks of class more stressful because I have to be more strict with money.” Overwhelmingly, students considered the need to purchase textbooks a “financial burden.”

Concerns about Usefulness

Very few students acknowledged the value of course textbooks. In fact, use*less*ness was a common theme. Students perceived textbooks as a “waste of money” because they saw them as underutilized by instructors. One student complained, “It bugs me when I pay about a hundred dollars for a book I will rarely use.” Another commented, “I probably wouldn’t buy it because most of the time when they require you to purchase a textbook, it’s not actually used that much.” Many students were concerned that the book was not incorporated into course assignments, and others complained that “some teachers require [a textbook] and never get around to using it.”

Several participants suggested that reading materials should be included in tuition, provided by instructors, or available for free online. One student responded, “I feel like gen-ed courses should at the very least try to make the material available online for free or have class copies of material.” Another student argued, “Much of the information we need as students can usually be provided through free articles, PDFs, or from learning about our professors’ own experiences.” One student went so far as to share how they would like to receive class copies by describing that “it would be helpful if books were included in tuition and the professor could just hand them to each student when classes begin for the semester.” These and similar sentiments were repeated by the majority of study respondents.

Greater Perceived Value in Major Course Textbooks

A preference for no-cost materials was distinctly made for general education courses and not generally held as a preference for major courses. For example, one student asserted, “More advanced classes may need textbooks, but general education courses should supply them.” Another unequivocally remarked, “I believe gen-ed textbooks should be provided, and major focused textbooks should be purchased.” Students perceived a distinction between the usefulness of textbooks in general education courses when compared to their major courses. Specifically, they found general education course texts to be less useful beyond a single semester, whereas major course texts can be useful in other courses, as well as in their future career. One student stated, “I think it’s more important to require a textbook for a major degree course because you are going to use that information forever during the course of your career in college and in the real world.” Again, the following comment illustrates this distinction:

> It is different because for my major classes I can use the book multiple times, not just that semester. I can use it to study for maybe medical school or PA school. On the other hand, I will never use the purchased book [for gen ed courses] that I was required to purchase.

In addition to perceiving a difference in usefulness, students’ opinions about textbooks were influenced by a perceived lack of choice related to general education courses. Students tended to see general education courses as forced upon them, only needed for graduation, and not important to their major

degree. Student choice was often cited as a motivating factor to purchase texts for major courses. For example, one student lamented,

> I am significantly more okay with purchasing a textbook for my major, because for the most part, I decided to take that class, but when I am "forced" to take a gen ed class and then I am required to buy a textbook it is upsetting.

Another student plainly articulated this distinction: "Major-focused classes are different, as these classes are what the student is electing to take in order to fulfill their future career."

Finally, students expressed frustration when high costs, uselessness, and lack of choice coincided. For example, one student posed their response as a question, "Most of us students who purchase textbooks end up not needing them for the future, so I am renting a book for $80 for one class that the university is telling me I need to take?" Another student commented on the same interwoven issues in no uncertain terms:

> I think there is a difference when a general education course requires a textbook than when a major degree course because the student is already required to take classes that do not pertain to their major. Being forced to buy or rent expensive textbooks for a gen ed class is ridiculous.

Overwhelmingly, despite the intended purpose of requiring course materials, students in the current study did not see the value of textbooks in general education courses. Instead, students saw them as overpriced, underutilized, and less important than major course texts.

Discussion

Our goal in pursuing this pilot project was to compare the use of OER textbooks in the public speaking course to the use of a standard textbook, *The Art of Public Speaking* (Lucas, 2019), and to provide a rationale for the use of OER in general education courses, broadly. It is important to note in our discussion of findings that some popular textbooks in public speaking courses certainly have merit. However, the merits do not outweigh the concerns expressed in this study by the student respondents. We examined students' perceptions of requiring textbooks for purchase or rent and the potential benefits of OER implementation. The current study demonstrates that students overwhelmingly prefer free, easily accessible, online resources, echoing previous findings in the literature about OER (Cozart et al., 2021; Feldstein, 2012). Students tend to have positive attitudes toward OER, rating the materials equally or more positively than traditional printed textbooks, which echoes previous research (Hilton III et al., 2013; Hilton III, 2016; Jaggars et al., 2018; Lindshield & Adhikari, 2013; Watson et al., 2017). The current study suggests that students enrolled in basic public speaking courses will appreciate free and easy access to OER and will likely perform as well, if not better, when enrolled in courses that utilize OER and online alternatives to the traditional textbook (Allen et al., 2015; Engler & Shedlosky-Shoemaker, 2019; Feldstein et al., 2012; Fialkowski et al., 2020; Nyamweya, 2018).

A notable finding in the current project is that students tend to perceive a difference in value when comparing their major course materials with their general education course materials. Our data

show that students have negative feelings about purchasing textbooks, especially for courses they perceive as "forced" (i.e., general education courses). When faced with financial constraints, students reported seeing greater value in purchasing textbooks for their major courses and will often choose not to purchase a general education course text. Indeed, previous research (Benoit, 2018) suggests that over 75% of undergraduate students will sell back some of the textbooks they purchased at the end of any given semester. The current study further illustrates students' frustration with being obligated to purchase costly textbooks that they do not see as valuable, echoing previous research from Unni (2005) that indicated that a textbook's usefulness and perceived value is directly influenced by perceived future job relevance. Thus, it would behoove any department offering the basic public speaking course to acknowledge students' limitations, motivations, and patterned behaviors related to purchasing course textbooks and provide OER where possible. As mentioned by some study participants, departments choosing to retain their preferred standard textbook could invest in "class copies" to distribute at the beginning of each semester. However, with the low- or no-cost options of open resources, departments would save substantially by adapting, adopting, or creating OER for their general education courses to meet student needs.

Limitations and Future Research

Though student perceptions of textbook costs and usefulness should be taken as valuable knowledge to influence course designs, future studies could more objectively assess student engagement and the effectiveness of OER with pretest/posttest designs. The current study reflects student perceptions, yet it does not empirically compare the quality of OER reading materials to the standard textbook. An experimental design would allow for the use of scales to measure baseline competencies and compare them to measurements taken after exposure to each treatment. Additionally, while qualitative data provides valuable insights into students' perspectives, self-reported data should always be taken with some caution, as it can be influenced by issues with recall and participant bias.

Conclusion

The results of this project provide general education instructors with a rationale to adopt OER in the future. Certainly, having access to course reading materials on the first day due to the immediate availability of OER gives students an advantage when compared to students who may have experienced delayed access when required to purchase or rent traditional texts. Additionally, OER are portable, convenient, and accessible from multiple devices, while textbooks are heavy and may not be carried to class every day. This allows students to read their course materials anytime, from anywhere. Furthermore, OER materials can be created with students' specific needs in mind, resulting in highly relevant, instructor-curated content (Cozart et al., 2021). Finally, as Prensky (2012) has argued, in the information age, many of our students are digital natives. This is important to note because digital natives "move quickly through information and prefer to seek out answers actively, rather than wait passively" (Feldstein et al., 2012, para. 2). The digital content of OER used in the current study allows students to navigate information more conveniently, and students who are digital natives may benefit from the use of tools that are not available in traditional hard copy texts (e.g., Ctrl+F, screen readers).

The current study further illustrates how students overwhelmingly prefer OER compared to the traditional text, especially for general education courses. The tone of students' collective remarks regarding textbooks is one of bitterness. We would be remiss to continue asking students to purchase expensive textbooks in our general education courses knowing the obstacles they face, the sacrifices they make, and how lower motivation for purchasing texts in general education courses is related to lower engagement and performance (Buczynski, 2007; Spica, 2020). We should be asking ourselves why we continue to require students to bear the burden of costly textbooks for our general education courses, which serve as the "front porch" to our departments and disciplines (Valenzano III et al., 2014). As educators who prioritize student success, the incorporation of OER may be one of the easiest strategies to respond to students' contemporary needs.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to this research project.

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Volume **03** (2025) Issue 1 https://doi.org/10.31274/joerhe.17789
Peer Review

Open Peer Review

Brunet, M. (2024, May). [Why Are We Still Asking Students to Buy Textbooks for General Education? by N. Hoskins & K. G. Gruber]. *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, 3*(1), 14-29. doi: 10.31274/joerhe.17789

Reviewer: Mélanie Brunet

Recommendation: Major 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, this article fits within the scope of the journal, although the OER aspect of the argument could be more prominent. I think it has the potential to be a valuable contribution to the OE literature by making the case for more widespread use of OER in General Education courses, using a public speaking course as an example, but the focus is more on students' perception of free materials vs commercial textbooks than about OER. While affordability has a place in the OE literature, the article is missing significant details about the OER pilot project that is said to have inspired the authors to make the case for OER in General Education courses. It is an important topic, and the content is engaging, but the article needs more work.

Organization

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

Yes, the article proceeds logically and adheres to the structure recommended by the journal. However, there are significant gaps that make the leap from public speaking courses to communications courses to General Education courses not as convincing as it could be. I strongly recommend adding a section that explains the original OER pilot project from which this article stems to put the focus even more on OER instead of mostly relying on students' responses to questions that emphasize their negative attitudes towards textbooks but not necessarily positive perceptions of OER.

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?

There are not enough details about the methodology for the overall project to judge if the subsection of the study that is the subject of this article is sound. Focusing on two open-ended questions about purchasing or renting textbooks and if the type of course makes a difference in students' decision to acquire the textbook does not clearly support the claim that "students tend to have positive attitudes toward OER." It shows that they prefer free materials, which may not be OER. To demonstrate students' positive attitudes to OER, this article would need to refer to other parts of the pilot project that could provide more solid evidence.

More complete data could be provided in the table to cover the remaining percentages that are missing from the total.

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.

I noticed some inconsistencies in the list of references, which I pointed out in the article itself. I also added some comments and suggested a few edits. Otherwise, there are no significant problems with expression or flow.

Application:

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

It could impact the use of OER in General Education courses, but a more direct and explicit link to the OER pilot project at the origin of this smaller study must be made. Other parts of this pilot project could provide more supportive data about attitudes towards OER instead of just free materials. There is a significant leap being made from student perceptions based on two questions out of a larger survey and a well-supported rationale for using OER in General Education courses. On the surface, the use of an OER in a public speaking course appears to be making a solid case for no longer using a textbook in courses on that topic, but the student perceptions that are at the heart of the argument do not address the use of OER specifically.

What are the stronger points/qualities of the article?

The stronger point of this article is its use of students' voices (with actual quotes), which tends to be missing in many studies that focus more on the aggregate results.

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

There is a significant leap made from students' perceptions about commercial textbooks and free materials and stating that they have positive attitudes toward OER. Since this article stems from a larger pilot project using an OER in a public speaking course, I would recommend incorporating evidence gathered from the rest of the survey and provide more information about that pilot project to put these conclusions in their proper context.

Peer Review Ranking: Scope

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

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

Major Revisions Required

Volume **03** (2025) Issue 1 https://doi.org/10.31274/joerhe.17789
Peer Review

Open Peer Review

Farmer, E. (2024, May). [Why Are We Still Asking Students to Buy Textbooks for General Education? by N. Hoskins & K. G. Gruber]. *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, 3*(1), 14-29. doi: 10.31274/joerhe.17789

Reviewer: Elnora Farmer

Recommendation: Minor 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?

This article is in scope for the *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education* and covers content related to the utilization of OER materials in higher education. The study focuses on an important topic of value, particularly concerning the implementation of OER materials within a specific discipline and area of general education that can be impactful for students.

Organization

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

The paper is well-organized with clear introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion sections. Content is logical and easy to follow.

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 for data gathering and analysis is appropriate.

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.

The writing style within the paper provides clarity on the subject of OER, with the literature review, methods, study results, and discussion presented in an understandable manner. There is a balance between description and critical analysis.

Application:

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

The article provides valuable student perspectives on a relevant topic concerning the rising costs of education and course materials. The findings have implications for the adoption of OER as a solution to address students' needs and concerns.

What are the stronger points/qualities of the article?

The study provides insights into students' perspectives on textbook requirements, highlighting the potential benefits of OER in addressing students' concern, particularly as they relate to materials, financial needs, etc. as students complete general education courses. The primary themes, codes, and quotes are presented and well-identified in conjunction with a discussion of the study's results.

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

Consider expanding the literature review to include additional background research on OER, historical impacts, success, student perceptions, and value which would support the alignment with the discussion. Also, consider exploring literature focusing on research regarding OER implementation and impacts within other general education courses for support and comparisons.

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?

Very 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?

Highly 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?

Highly Sound

Overall Evaluation

Minor Revisions Required
