

Creating Open Educational Resources (OER) for Global Apparel Trade and Sourcing Courses

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Background

The curriculums of most four-year fashion and apparel programs in U.S. institutions require a course addressing global apparel trade and sourcing (Lu, 2018). Considering sourcing's increasingly critical role in fashion companies' business operations, such a course also prepares students with essential knowledge and skills needed for their future employment in the globalized fashion industry (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

Why OER for apparel trade and sourcing classes?

First, unlike other fashion topics, the available textbooks related to apparel sourcing and trade are insufficient and expensive, causing potential affordability and learning equity issues (Wiley et al., 2014). Second, because of the fast-changing nature of apparel sourcing, traditional textbooks could become outdated even before publication (Ha-Brookshire, 2017; Karpova et al., 2021). Additionally, as trade and sourcing are not typically among the topics of natural interest to fashion majors, using traditional textbooks with dry texts full of technical terms could make it even more challenging to engage students and raise their learning interest (Lu, 2018).

Instead, using OER for apparel trade and sourcing classes could have several notable advantages: 1) reduce students' financial burden and create a more inclusive learning environment (Walsh, 2020); 2) incorporate more updated and engaging learning material beyond texts into the course and raise students' learning interest (Hwang et al., 2022); 3) Enjoy more flexibility in corporation learning goals into the course, such as preparing students' critical thinking and data analysis skills increasingly expected for future talents working in the fashion industry (Merryman & Lu, 2021).

Developing OER for apparel trade and sourcing classes

An OER for a 14-week apparel trade and sourcing class, targeting junior or senior fashion majors, was developed based on an extensive literature review and consultation with apparel sourcing executives. The OER includes three types of materials:

- 1) Reading materials: About 2-3 articles or short videos were selected from authentic industry publications (e.g., Sourcing Journal) and Youtube for each chapter covered by the course. These materials replaced "outdated examples" in traditional textbooks with more engaging, timely, and interactive content. Each selected article or video also addressed a specific knowledge point. Further, about 2-3 discussion questions were developed for each article or video to foster active reading, help students check their understanding of the materials and encourage them to apply what they learned in the class to think and solve real-world problems.
- 2) Case studies: To encourage students' active learning and, in particular, preparing their critical thinking and data analysis skills, two in-depth original case studies highly relevant to the course content were created. The case study, each about 3,000-5000 words, followed the format suggested by Bloomsbury (2024) and included additional discussion questions and teaching notes.

- 3) Industry interviews: Four written or recorded video interviews with apparel sourcing professionals were created for the course. These interviews aimed to connect course learning with career development, including enhancing students' understanding of apparel sourcing in practice and job opportunities related to apparel sourcing and trade.

Assessment of OER's teaching effectiveness

The OER material was implemented in a global apparel trade and sourcing class in Spring 2023 and again in Fall 2023. At the end of each semester, students were invited to provide anonymous feedback on the use of OER materials in the course through an online survey. The survey included two open-ended questions: 1) This semester, we used open educational resources (OER) to replace the traditional textbook. What are your thoughts on this experience, and why? 2) What aspects of the OER could be improved and why?

A total of 42 students responded to the survey (i.e., n=20 in Spring 2023 and n=22 in Fall 2023). Students' qualitative feedback was analyzed using MAXQDA software (Godau, 2023). The results show that students reported highly positive learning experiences using the OER overall. Particularly, students found the OER materials more engaging and timely than traditional textbooks. For example, as student #2 noted, *"I find textbooks to be extremely dreadful as they are so big and are filled with so many words and it can get confusing. The OER this semester was such a unique experience. I had the accessibility to so many resources of readings, charts, videos, and open discussions with other students."* Student #4 added, *"Usually, I don't end up using my textbooks in full because a lot of information in them aren't up to date or relevant to what we learn, so having content that was catered to the course and up-to-date information was much more helpful than a traditional textbook."*

Students also said that using OER improved their learning effectiveness. For example, student #6 noted, *"I think the use of lots of videos made it a lot easier to grasp certain concepts and stay engaged. When having to read an entire textbook chapter, I often get distracted or confused because so much information is being thrown at me at once."* Likewise, student #9 said, *"I like learning about real-world issues through case studies, interviews with industry professionals, and timely articles."* Student #10 even suggested, *"Maybe invite more professionals for interviews."*

Future plans

The OER materials and their use could be improved and expanded in several aspects. First, instructors and students from other fashion institutions could be invited to use the OER for their global apparel trade and sourcing classes and provide feedback on the materials' effectiveness and quality. Second, given the fast-changing nature of apparel sourcing and trade, additional OER materials could be created to make the content fresh and up-to-date. Third, besides students' reported learning satisfaction, future assessments can be extended to students' learning effectiveness using OER instead of traditional textbooks. Additionally, an OER platform focusing on global apparel trade and sourcing could be developed. Faculty with expertise in this area could be invited to contribute. Ultimately, this platform could serve as a public knowledge hub for faculty, students, and industry professionals interested in learning about apparel trade and sourcing.

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