

**"Harnessing the Benefits of Open Educational Resources (OER): Prospects and Challenges for National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)"**

**BY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

When Wayne Hodgins first coined the term Open Educational Resources (OER) in 1994,( Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia) the concept seemed strange, but then it promptly gained acceptance among educators and instructional designers. This further popularized the idea of re-using digital materials for a variety of teaching processes. The (OER) concept supports Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares that "everyone has the right to education, and that technical and professional education shall be made generally available" (United Nations, 1948). This encouraged the proliferation of educational institutions including institutes of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). In the past, distance education was limited in the number of people served because of the production and communication costs. Traditionally, Open and Distance Learning institutions spent huge amounts of money on the production and reproduction of course materials as well as their transportation to the learners. Presently, technology has reduced the cost of providing learning materials to the learners to the barest minimum because the materials can simply be placed online, for easy access by innumerable learners who require the materials for their studies. Hence, universities can make their content available to a host of learners at the barest minimal costs. Today, the trend is changing due to the introduction and acceptance of the OER movement. This shift has positively and significantly impacted on ODL though, with its own implications, and has empowered distance educators to play important roles towards achieving the "right" to universal education. The contents that the various universities place online through the open courseware project have the potentials to substantially improve the quality of life of learners world-wide.

This paper will discuss the Open- knowledge movement, its contributions towards achieving the provisions of the Human Rights Declaration of 1948, the benefits NOUN would derived from it and the contributions she has made towards the open knowledge initiative. Finally, it will consider the challenges may in her bid to embracing the current trends in providing educational resources at very minimal costs, and how she can move distance education forward in Nigeria through the OER movement.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Open Educational Resources Movement.**

The Open Educational Resources (OER) movement is a technology- empowered effort to create and share educational content on a global level. (Caswell, Henson, Jensen, and Wiley: 2008). It originated from developments in open and distance learning (ODL) and in the wider context of a culture of open knowledge, open source, free sharing and peer collaboration, which emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup>

The open educational resources (OER) in higher education in the 21st century is part of the positive strides towards 'opening up' what was previously 'closed' to all except a limited number of people who paid for access to or use of information and services. (Hodgkinson-Williams, 2010:) OER has advanced from sharing specific 'products' as it was formerly thought of, to embracing wider pedagogical functions and procedures. The desire for tutors and learners to share their intellectual property freely with the rest of the world is a the key notion of the OER movement. The purpose of the Open Educational Resources movement is to provide open access to high quality digital educational materials. Many Universities and private organizations, have already participated in this project.

### **Definition of OER**

The term "Open Educational Resources" (OER) have been severally defined by different scholars. However, the key concepts about this variety of definitions is that OER are:

freely accessible, digitized materials, documents and media usually openly licensed which are useful for teaching, learning, educational assessment and research purposes. They are available for educators, students and self-learners to use and re-use for teaching, learning and research ([Wikipedia](#)). teaching, learning and research ([Wikipedia](#)). They reside in the

public domain and they have been released under an intellectual property that permits their free use or re-purposing by others (The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation).

What can be generally deduced from these definitions is that Open Educational Resources (OER) are learning materials freely available to the public for easy access by learners, tutors and researchers at no cost. This presupposes that learners can download prescribed textbooks for their courses at no cost.

### **Motivation for Adoption and use of OER**

According to [Wikipedia](#), OER is a term that was first adopted at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries funded by the Hewlett Foundation. The development and promotion of open educational resources is often motivated by a desire to curb the "commodification" of knowledge and provide an alternate or enhanced educational paradigm. (Wikipedia encyclopedia). The Open Educational Resource (OER) movement, was equally motivated by the ideal that knowledge is the common wealth of humankind and should be freely shared. Can you imagine a world without any restrictions on intellectual property, where educators can download lecture notes, lesson plans, e-learning courses and have the freedom to copy, modify, and translate these resources to suit their own unique teaching styles and local learning needs, with the added advantage of redistributing these materials without restriction. The whole essence was to advance formal and informal learning through the worldwide sharing and use of free, open, high-quality educational materials organized as courses. (Ipaye: 2010)

### **An Overview of the Open Course Ware Concept**

OpenCourseWare, or OCW, is a term applied to course materials created by universities and shared freely with the world via the internet." The movement started in 1999 when the University of Tübingen in Germany published videos of lectures online. The OCW movement only took off, however, when MIT launched its OpenCourse in October 2002. The aim was to "enhance human learning worldwide by the availability of a web of knowledge. Many other Universities who supported the project include: Yale, the University of Michigan, and the University of California Berkeley. Several use these educational materials as courses in their universities. These are the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Open University, Johns Hopkins, Kyoto University, Notre Dame, and Korea University.

### **The Open OpenCourseWare Consortium:**

The Open OpenCourseWare Consortium: is a collection of more than 250 Universities and associated organizations worldwide with more than 13,000 Courses placed online and in 20 languages. The essence is to advance formal and informal learning through the worldwide sharing and use of free, open, high-quality educational materials organized as courses.

### **Licensing of OER: The Creative Commons (CC)**

To somewhat protect the open education resources from misuse and to direct the mode of use, alternative and more flexible licensing were made by the Creative Commons, Creative Commons is an organisation that provides ready-made licensing agreements that are less restrictive than the "all rights reserved" terms of standard international copyright. It provides the legal and technical framework vital for the long-term success of OER, making it possible for educational resources to be widely accessible, adaptable, useable and reusable. Creative Commons licenses provide a mechanism that allows educators to freely share and reuse digital educational materials for teaching and learning. (Ipaye: 2010) observes that Creative Commons is the land on which OER walks. The licences are based on four specific conditions: "attribution, share alike, non-commercial and no derivative works". In 2002, Creative Commons released their first set of copyright licenses that

helped content producers license their content for reuse.

### **Types of Open Educational Resources and OER policy**

OER include: textbooks, course materials, modules, videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge, audiovideo lectures, Sounds and music lesson plans, quizzes, syllabi, instructional modules, simulations, content, software tools, licenses and best practices. OER may be freely and openly available static resources, dynamic resources which change over time in the course of having knowledge seekers interacting with and updating , or a course or module with a combination of these resources.

By Wikipedia's definition, Open educational resources policies are principles or tenets adopted by governing bodies in support of the use of open content and practices in educational institutions. Creative Commons has a record of open educational resources policy registry lists of 77 current and proposed open education policies world wide. More policies are still emerging on both domestic, national and provincial levels. The major ones are:

- OER Africa, an initiative established by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) to play a leading role in driving the development and use of OER across all education sectors in the African
- Wikiwijs (the Netherlands), HEFCE, the UK Higher Education Academy and JISC, etc.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)**

The National Open University of Nigeria was originally established in 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1983 by an Act of the National Assembly but was suspended on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1984, by the then Military Head of the State, General Muhammadu Buhari, while delivering a National Broadcast on the 1984/85 budget. Over the period, the need to brace up with new trends in developments in communication and information technology, for economically funding education, filling the gaps in education occasioned by social status, marginalization and lack of resource became imminent. In recognition of its role of handling Nigeria's educational problems and providing access to education for all, NOUN was resuscitated by the government of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2002. Its main goal is to adopt distance education as a desirable and inevitable mode for providing access to all and achieve equitable representation by taking the distance out of education. The declaration of 2001-2010 as a decade of distance education in Nigeria by stake holders in education, in Abuja on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 had already set the pace for NOUN to take off. The whole essence was to take the distance **out** of education.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) being the tertiary institution for Open and Distant Learning in Nigeria. NOUN has no doubt, taken gallant strides towards the provision of highly accessible and enhanced quality education; anchored on social justice, equity, equality and National cohesion, through a comprehensive reach that transcends all barriers. Through the appropriate and effective use of information communication technology (ICT), NOUN is providing a good blend of academic professionals, continuing education extension and training programmes through the ODL system. With 53 study centres all over the Federation and a total number of 204,464 students enrolled, NOUN can be considered as a success story in the Nigerian educational system. The imperative role of ICT in the production of knowledge, the on-line and learner support services, as well as a standard virtual library combine to make NOUN a name to be reckoned with in the Nigerian educational system.

NOUN programmes are unique in the sense that the mode of study is very flexible as it allows the students to carry their loads bit by bit. This means that the student can extend the programme duration by twice the normal length of time. This however, does not make it a part-time programme. Rather, NOUN runs full-fledged university programmes. Her uniqueness encourages full employment

and learning at the same time. Accordingly, the motto of NOUN is “**Work and Learn**”. Programme Types includes: Certificates, Diplomas, First Degrees, Post Graduates and PhDs. Feedback is through Tutor Marked assignments (TMAS) and periodic face to face Tutorials sessions. Quality is the watchword for building confidence in our students, the public and employees. NOUN’s enrolment as a member of the OpenCourseWare Consortium and her subsequent contributions by formally placing her educational resources online will advance the Abuja declaration of 2010.

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## **PROSPECTS FOR NOUN**

The circumstance of the establishment of NOUN clearly places her on top of the list of institutions that would benefit from the OER initiative. She stands to gain a lot in terms of staff training, institutional development, student empowerment, considering the fact that there is only limited educational resources such as laboratory equipment and textbooks in Nigerian when compared to the developed countries of the world, Open Educational Resources have a range of facilities to offer NOUN.

The objective of this online-project is to support students and teachers in the creation, re-use and sharing of e-learning material. Management staff will equally find information about how to implement open learning skills in their administrative procedures. The entire academic and some administrative staff of Noun can harness the benefits of OER through the use of Internet and digital technologies which will transform how they learn and work.

OER can help NOUN counter the rising costs of developing educational programs because it saves the academic staff the cost and of trouble the uncertainty over whether a particular material may be used legally in a particular teaching and learning context.

NOUN can gain a lot by registering as an active member of the OER Consortium and be part of the global community of open educational resource “sharing” and “development”. A popular slogan in the in open source is : “What you give, you receive back improved.”

The OER initiative has created an easy avenue for sourcing digital materials that are available for free and immediate use, thereby eliminating the undue pressure involved in seeking permission to use existing digital materials and thus saves the time wasted in this process.

Prospective NOUN students may assess or rate the institutional standard by looking at her materials made available on the NET. This has some corporate image implications for the institution

An independent learner who has access to the Internet can access material from some of the best universities in the world and use these materials to complement his/her institutional course materials.

NOUN will gain a lot of publicity through her participation in OER and this will result in an economic advantage over other ODL institutions in Nigeria as the enhanced public image will attract more students to NOUN.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Though NOUN has not registered formally as a member of the consortium, but it has made enough academic input to reckon with. Majority of the academia in Nigeria access NOUN course material with ease because, though they are copyrighted, there are no serious restrictions on NOUN Educational resources on the WEB. A lot of lecturers, students and researchers have attested to the easy accessibility of these materials. They have equally commended the very high quality of NOUN Courseware on the institution’s website. Secondly, NOUN has already trained a good number of her academic staff on the OER initiative and has empowered them to create accounts with the creative commons. This is a very positive move towards attaining the goals of UN Declaration of 1948.

## **CHALLENGES**

The challenges NOUN may face in her journey towards attaining the OER goal include:

- Work load of NOUN staff which keeps them too busy to have time to go through the rigours of becoming members of the OCW consortium or seeking information on how to place their educational resources on the opencourseware online.  
Majority of NOUN staff who have educational resources to place on the opencourseware are not adequately educated on the procedures for placing their materials on this platform,
- The university's broad band is not sufficient to carry out the functions required for this process.
- The NOUN library does not regularly update staff on current trends on the OER concept.
- Provision of Open Educational Resources requires a lot of funds. NOUN has to source additional funds for this purpose.

## **CONCLUSION**

The OER movement has been built largely on the goodwill of contributing academics who, standing on, and using the generous seed-funding philanthropic foundations, ( especially the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation) have made meaningful contributions towards achieving high quality education ODL programmes. To ensure the sustainability of this gallant project, many more academics and institutions need to join the movement and make their own invaluable contributions. NOUN cannot be left out in this laudable project and its attending profits. NOUN is in the forefront of Quality Assurance. She cannot, therefore, afford to neglect the cost-saving potential and impact of OER on QA in the advancement of ODL in the 21st century pedagogical practices .

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that NOUN should formally register with the consortium and properly register her course wares in the opencourseware ONLINE, since her course materials are already on the WEB, being freely accessed by all and sundry .

It is equally recommended that the institution's broad band should be updated and enhanced in order to undertake this endeavor as well as train both her academic and IT staff more frequently, so as to empower them to skillfully mount NOUN courseware in the WEB.

NOUN needs to formulate policies that will support the current momentum already gathered by the OER movement

In these ways, NOUN would have contributed meaningfully to the course of the OER movement which is bent on achieving the goals of Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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