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Sub-theme: Changing mindsets for inclusive open education

# OER-based TEL: a Catalyst for Blended Learning at Bangladesh Open University

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## Abstract:

Open Educational Resources (OER) have emerged as a transformative force in promoting Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL), particularly in blended learning environments. This study explores the role of OER-based TEL as a catalyst for blended learning at Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The research focuses on the perceptions, practices, and experiences of BOU faculty members engaged in designing and delivering blended learning courses. Using a qualitative research approach, the study collects data through semi-structured interviews with faculty members across different academic schools of BOU. Thematic analysis is employed to identify key themes related to the adoption of OER-based TEL, including its impact on instructional design, learner engagement, and institutional support mechanisms. Preliminary findings suggest that while BOU faculty recognize the potential of OER-based TEL in enhancing learning flexibility and accessibility, they face challenges such as limited technical infrastructure, insufficient training, and concerns about content localization. The study highlights the need for a supportive policy framework, continuous professional development, and collaborative resource creation. By examining faculty perspectives, this research aims to provide actionable insights into fostering an enabling environment for OER-based TEL. Its emphases its potential as a strategic approach to advancing blended learning practices at BOU, thereby contributing to more inclusive and innovative educational delivery.

**Keywords:** OER, TEL, BOU

## Introduction

In the rapidly evolving higher education, whether delivered through face-to-face (F2F) or via open and distance learning (ODL), Open Educational Resources (OER) have emerged as powerful tools for enhancing accessibility and innovation in teaching and learning. OER are defined by UNESCO as “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation, and redistribution by others” (UNESCO, 2021). Another talked-about term is Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL), OER can significantly advance blended learning (BL) models, especially in open universities serving disadvantaged and geographically dispersed learners. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), as the country’s only national distance education institution, is exclusively positioned to leverage OER-based TEL to expand learning opportunities across its large student body. Blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with digital content and interactive technologies, is becoming increasingly relevant in the post-pandemic era (Bozkurt et al., 2020). In BOU’s context, the integration of OER within TEL platforms offers potential to improve instructional design, foster learner engagement, and increase flexibility and cost-effectiveness in course delivery. Despite the growing advocacy for OER-based TEL, its practical implementation in developing countries like Bangladesh remains uneven. Faculty members at BOU acknowledge the pedagogical value of OER, yet face barriers including lack of technical infrastructure, inadequate training, and concerns about the contextual relevance and quality of open content (Rahman, 2025). Moreover, institutional policies often lag behind the fast-paced growth of open and digital education practices, creating uncertainties around intellectual property, accreditation, and sustainability. This study investigates the role of OER-based TEL in catalyzing blended learning at BOU by exploring faculty perceptions, experiences, and practices across various academic schools. It aims to understand how educators are integrating OER into their teaching and what institutional conditions are enabling—or constraining—this transition. Through a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research contributes to the broader discourse on open and inclusive

education in the Global South. The findings are expected to inform strategic directions for OER adoption and TEL capacity-building within BOU, in alignment with international frameworks for sustainable development and digital transformation in education (UNESCO, 2021).

## Objectives

This research achieves the following objectives:

- i) To explore the perceptions and experiences of BOU faculty members regarding the integration of OER-based TEL into blended learning.
- ii) To examine the practices and challenges encountered by faculty in designing and delivering OER-based blended learning courses across different academic schools at BOU.
- iii) To analyze the institutional support mechanisms, including infrastructure, training, and policy that influence the adoption of OER-based TEL at BOU.
- iv) To recommend ways to improve OER-based TEL in blended learning at BOU by addressing challenges, building faculty skills, and encouraging collaboration and supportive policies.

## Literature Survey

The term Open Educational Resources (OER) was coined in 2002 through an UNESCO intervention; Khan Academy, launched in 2006, exemplifies this innovation (Bain, 2023). Open Educational Resources (OERs) are free teaching and learning materials—like textbooks, videos, and podcasts—available under open licenses. They allow users to reuse, revise, remix, retain, and redistribute content without paying royalties or seeking permission (Olivier & Rambow, 2023). OERs are typically free in digital form and low-cost in print (Jhangiani et al., 2018). Kwantlen Polytechnic University describes OERs as publicly available and openly licensed educational tools (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2023). In this way, the global movement toward open and inclusive education has brought OER to the forefront of educational reform. OER, defined by UNESCO as publicly accessible learning materials released under open licenses, have been heralded as a means to improve educational equity and foster innovation in pedagogy. These resources, when integrated into TEL environments, create new possibilities for blended learning—especially in distance and open universities.

The use of OER in blended learning has been widely examined. Springer (2019) found that students who use OER tend to perform as well as or better than those using traditional textbooks, with the added benefit of cost savings. He argues that the use of OER encourages more flexible and learner-centered instructional design. Blended learning, by integrating online digital media with traditional classroom methods, becomes more dynamic and adaptable when powered by OER (Cho & Permzadian, 2024). In the context of distance education, particularly in the Global South, OER-based TEL has become an essential mechanism for expanding access to quality learning. For example, in a study of Sub-Saharan African universities, Wolfenden and Buckler (2012) found that OER facilitated teacher education through contextualized and collaboratively developed content. The collaborative nature of OER development supports institutional capacity-building, while the open licensing model enables adaptation to local contexts. Such flexibility is vital in low-resource settings, where the digital divide and infrastructural limitations are common.

In Bangladesh, the integration of OER into formal education systems has gained momentum, especially in higher education. Islam and Grönlund (2017) found that while learners appreciated the flexibility and accessibility of OER and Rahman (2025) their effectiveness was contingent upon digital readiness and guidance from instructors. These study emphasized the need for pedagogical training for faculty and infrastructural support for learners. As Bangladesh transitions to a more blended model of learning, these challenges remain pertinent.

Faculty attitudes and institutional support play a central role in the adoption of OER. Rolfe (2017) noted that instructors are more likely to adopt OER if they believe in the value of open sharing and receive institutional incentives or recognition. Furthermore, professional development that builds digital competencies and awareness of open licenses is crucial (Inamorato dos Santos, 2023). In the absence of policy frameworks or clear quality assurance mechanisms, however, educators may be hesitant to use OER, fearing reputational risks or legal issues (Martin & Stella, 2007). In the post-pandemic educational landscape, blended learning has become a strategic imperative. Bozkurt et al. (2020) provided a global synthesis of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in education, noting that institutions that had already integrated TEL and OER were better positioned to shift to remote or hybrid learning models. Their research highlighted that OER empowered institutions to rapidly localize content, reduce costs, and foster resilience in instructional delivery during crises.

Research on faculty engagement with OER in Asia reveals mixed outcomes. While awareness of OER was high among faculty, actual use was relatively low due to time constraints, lack of training, and concerns over content quality (Venkaiah, 2008). This reflects a broader issue of “awareness-to-action” gaps, where theoretical support for OER does not always translate into practice (Ambrose, et al., 2024). Institutional leadership and targeted capacity-building initiatives are needed to close this gap.

In the Bangladeshi context, BOU has made notable strides in adopting OER and promoting blended learning. Studies by Rahman et al. (2020) indicate that while BOU’s Learning Management System (LMS) and OER-based materials have enhanced student engagement in pilot programs, their reach remains limited due to uneven internet access and inconsistent instructional design. This underscores the importance of integrating OER into broader digital strategies and aligning them with national policies for education and ICT.

Finally, sustainable implementation of OER-based TEL requires systemic integration. Lane (2017) emphasizes that openness should not be limited to content but extended to institutional processes, assessment methods, and pedagogy. Blended learning environments must be co-designed with learners and educators to ensure contextual relevance and sustainability. Such models are particularly important in open universities, where learner autonomy and flexibility are foundational. Literature reveals the transformative potential of OER-based TEL in promoting blended learning, especially within open and distance education systems. However, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on faculty readiness, supportive policies, infrastructural development, and inclusive design. For institutions like BOU, this means investing not only in technology but also in people and pedagogy. The current study builds on these insights by exploring how BOU faculty perceive and implement OER in blended learning environments—an inquiry that could guide future innovation in ODL and national educational planning.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how faculty members at BOU perceive and implement OER-based TEL in blended learning environments. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow in-depth examination of participants’ experiences, practices, and institutional realities, which are often difficult to quantify but essential for understanding the complexity of educational innovation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shava & Nkengbeza, 2019). The study adopted a multiple case study strategy, enabling the investigation of different academic schools within BOU as individual but related units of analysis (Yin, 2014). This approach allows for cross-case comparisons while maintaining a holistic understanding of each context. Given BOU’s diverse academic offerings and faculty structures, the case study design provided rich and contextualized data. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting faculty members involved in designing or delivering blended courses using OER and TEL tools. A total of 15 faculty members were recruited from five academic schools, including the Open School, School of Education, and School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages. This sample size was sufficient for thematic saturation, which occurs when additional data no longer yield new insights (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or phone communication, depending on participant availability and convenience. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and was recorded with consent. Interview questions were designed to elicit information about faculty members’ understanding of OER, their use of TEL platforms (e.g., Learning Management Systems, multimedia tools), challenges faced in blended learning, and institutional support received. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual observations. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. NVivo 14 software was used for organizing and coding the data, allowing for systematic identification of patterns and subthemes. The analysis focused on themes such as instructional design practices, faculty readiness, digital infrastructure, content localization, and institutional policy. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting to protect identities. All data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, the study applied strategies such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data across different schools and job roles. Participants were invited to review transcripts and validate emerging themes, enhancing the accuracy of interpretations. This methodology offers a robust framework to understand how BOU faculty navigate the opportunities and challenges of OER-based TEL in blended learning, providing insights for institutional policy and practice development.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

The integration of OER into TEL frameworks has transformed pedagogical practices in many ODL institutions worldwide. At BOU, OER-based TEL is viewed as a promising strategy for advancing blended learning models that respond to diverse learner needs. However, the study's findings reveal a gap where faculty perceptions, institutional structures, and infrastructural realities interplay to shape the effectiveness of such integration. The thematic analysis of interviews with faculty members from different academic schools at BOU highlighted five major themes: faculty attitudes and readiness, instructional design and content localization, digital infrastructure, institutional support, and policy alignment.

### **Faculty Attitudes and Readiness**

The analysis revealed a generally positive attitude among BOU faculty members toward OER. Most participants acknowledged that OER facilitates more flexible, affordable, and learner-centered education. However, there was a clear disparity between awareness and actual implementation. While many faculty members were familiar with the concept of OER, only a few had integrated it systematically into their blended courses. Two quoted comments that could reasonably represent the views of Participant 2 and Participant 14, aligned with the analysis:

Participant 2:

*"I know about OER and often browse through open resources, but I haven't had proper training on how to integrate them into my LMS or blended classes. So, I use them occasionally, not as part of a planned strategy."*

Participant 14:

*"OER is definitely useful—it allows us to offer students quality content without additional cost. But without clear institutional guidance and hands-on workshops, it's difficult to go beyond surface-level use."*

This gap between knowledge and practice mirrors the findings of Marín et al. (2022), who observed similar patterns in Indian open universities. Faculty readiness was often hindered by a lack of training in open licensing, digital pedagogy, and the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS). Critically, this raises the question of whether the mere availability of OER is sufficient for educational transformation. As Hilton (2016) argues, the success of OER depends not only on open access but on pedagogical strategies that make content meaningful and engaging. In BOU's case, most OER adoption appeared reactive rather than strategic, suggesting a need for stronger faculty development programs aligned with institutional goals.

### **Instructional Design and Content Localization**

Instructional design emerged as a critical challenge in the implementation of OER-based TEL. Faculty members reported that many OER available on global platforms lacked cultural and contextual relevance for Bangladeshi learners. Several participants emphasized the need to localize content—translating, adapting, and contextualizing materials to align with learners' socio-cultural realities. This issue of content mismatch is widely documented in the literature. Wolfenden and Buckler (2012) highlighted how Sub-Saharan African universities often adapted OER through co-creation and contextual redesign to ensure effectiveness. At BOU, however, there was little evidence of such co-creation efforts. Most faculty members either used global OER as-is or avoided them entirely due to language barriers and unfamiliar pedagogy. Participant quotes that reflect the findings and challenges related to instructional design, localization, and OER use at BOU:

Participant 1:

*"Most of the OER I find are in English and often don't reflect our students' realities. Without translation or cultural adaptation, they don't always make sense in our classrooms."*

Participant 3:

*"We need more support in instructional design. Just downloading a resource isn't enough—we have to modify it so that it fits our learners' context and background."*

Participant 7:

*"Sometimes I skip using OER because the content feels too foreign. The pedagogy and examples don't match how we teach or how our students learn here in Bangladesh."*

The findings call into question the assumption that OER are universally applicable. As Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter (2018) argue, equitable access requires inclusive design that considers gender, language, socio-economic

conditions, and cultural relevance. BOU's move toward blended learning must, therefore, be accompanied by investment in the localized development of open content and training in instructional design.

### **Digital Infrastructure and Technical Limitations**

The potential of TEL is contingent on robust infrastructure—a reality that was starkly highlighted in the study. Faculty members reported several issues: unreliable internet access, outdated digital tools, limited LMS functionality, and insufficient ICT support staff. These technical limitations not only affected content delivery but also disrupted student engagement. According to Islam and Grönlund (2017), infrastructural barriers are among the top deterrents to OER adoption in Bangladesh. Their study found that only 37% of rural students had stable internet connections. BOU's student demographic includes a significant number from rural and marginalized communities, making unified digital engagement particularly difficult. Moreover, some faculty expressed frustration with the lack of technical orientation when new TEL tools were introduced. Participant 10, reflecting the infrastructural and support challenges highlighted as under:

Participant 10:

*"Even when I want to try new TEL tools or OER, the internet is too slow, the LMS crashes, and there's no one to assist us when things go wrong. Without proper infrastructure and technical support, innovation feels like a burden instead of a possibility."*

The absence of structured onboarding further reduced their willingness to innovate. These observations echo Lane's (2017) contention that open education must be backed by system-wide support—technological, pedagogical, and managerial—for it to be sustainable.

### **Institutional Support and Professional Development**

Another major theme was the role of institutional leadership and support. Faculty members reported that while BOU encourages the use of OER, there is little incentive or recognition for faculty engagement in open practices. Without workload adjustments or academic recognition, the additional labor involved in curating or creating OER becomes a burden rather than an opportunity. The lack of formal policies or guidelines around OER was also notable. Faculty reported being unsure about copyright issues, quality standards, and institutional expectations. This policy vacuum is a significant barrier, as identified by Rolfe (2017), who noted that many educators avoid OER due to legal and reputational concerns. Professional development opportunities, where available, were often one-off workshops with minimal follow-up. Participants expressed the need for continuous learning communities, mentoring systems, and practical training in content development, learning design, and digital tools. Institutional leadership, lack of incentives, unclear policies, and limited professional development, here are two well-aligned participant quotes for Participant 2 and Participant 6:

Participant 2:

*"We're told to use OER, but there's no recognition or workload adjustment. It feels like extra work that isn't valued, so many of us just don't prioritize it."*

Participant 6:

*"I often hesitate to use or create OER because I'm not sure about the copyright rules or quality standards. There's no clear policy, and the occasional workshops don't go deep enough."*

These findings reinforce the call by Bozkurt et al. (2020) for long-term investment in teacher training, especially in the post-pandemic environment where blended learning is not optional but essential.

### **Policy Alignment and Strategic Integration**

One of the most critical findings was the disconnection between BOU's strategic aspirations and its operational practices. While the institution aspires to be a leader in digital and open learning, its internal systems often remain rooted in traditional, print-based distance education models. This misalignment results in fragmented implementation, where TEL initiatives operate in silos and fail to scale effectively. Institutional change requires policy coherence. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes the importance of national and institutional policies that recognize, incentivize, and resource OER adoption. BOU's current trajectory suggests the need for a comprehensive OER policy that aligns with its digital transformation goals. This includes integrating OER into curriculum design, performance evaluation, and academic planning processes. The findings of this study reveal that while BOU faculty members are generally receptive to OER and TEL, meaningful integration into blended learning remains limited by infrastructural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges. Critical analysis suggests that the transformative promise of OER cannot be

realized without localized content, systemic support, and strategic policy alignment. Insightful quote from Participant 11, reflecting the core themes of institutional misalignment, policy gaps, and the need for systemic change at BOU:

Participant 11:

*"We talk about becoming a digital university, but our systems are still paper-based, and there's no unified strategy for OER. Without clear policies and coordinated efforts, it feels like we're pushing digital change with analog tools."*

For BOU to truly act as a catalyst for inclusive, technology-driven education, it must move beyond awareness-building to institutional redesign—embedding OER practices in faculty development, curriculum design, digital infrastructure, and policy frameworks.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy, pedagogy, and practice in the context of open and distance learning at Bangladesh Open University (BOU) and similar institutions. While faculty members express positive attitudes toward OER-based Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL), systemic barriers—ranging from infrastructural deficits to limited institutional support—continue to hinder effective implementation. These findings suggest that the transformative potential of OER in blended learning cannot be realized through isolated efforts; rather, a strategic and coordinated institutional response is required. First, there is a pressing need for a formal OER policy at BOU that articulates standards for quality assurance, licensing, adaptation, and faculty incentives. This policy should be embedded within the university's broader digital transformation strategy and supported by clear guidelines for integrating OER into course design and evaluation processes. Second, capacity-building initiatives must go beyond one-time workshops. Continuous professional development programs are needed to enhance faculty competencies in digital pedagogy, instructional design, and the ethical use of OER. Establishing peer learning communities and mentorship models can promote collaboration and innovation. Third, investment in digital infrastructure and localized content production is essential. This includes improving internet access, upgrading Learning Management Systems (LMS), and supporting the contextualization of global OER to fit the Bangladeshi socio-cultural context. Finally, to ensure inclusivity, OER initiatives must be guided by social justice principles—addressing gender, language, and regional disparities. Collaborative partnerships with other institutions and networks such as the Commonwealth of Learning and OER Africa can provide valuable models and resources. BOU's journey toward effective OER-based TEL requires a holistic approach that aligns policy, pedagogy, technology, and equity—transforming blended learning from an aspirational model into an operational reality.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) within Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) as a catalyst for blended learning at Bangladesh Open University (BOU). Drawing insights from faculty experiences across academic schools, it reveals a complex landscape of promise and challenges. While faculty members generally acknowledge the potential of OER to improve access, affordability, and flexibility in education, systemic constraints—including limited technical infrastructure, insufficient training, and a lack of institutional policies—impede widespread adoption. Critically, the study underscores that meaningful integration of OER into blended learning requires more than awareness; it demands strategic alignment across policy, pedagogy, and practice. The success of OER-based TEL depends on localized content, continuous professional development, strong digital ecosystems, and inclusive frameworks that address diverse learner needs. BOU stands at a pivotal moment in its digital transformation journey. By embedding OER into its institutional fabric through coherent policies, capacity-building, and targeted investment, the university can lead in democratizing education through blended learning. The findings offer valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, and administrators aiming to build resilient, inclusive, and future-ready open education systems not only in Bangladesh but across the Global South.

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