

Open Education Resources: Next Steps?



Video Presentation

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Transcript

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Greetings to all of you attending the PNGADE Conference. It is an honour to be present ‘virtually’ at this important event and I’m very grateful to Dr Abdul Mannan for the invitation. My organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning, works closely with many of you and we hope to strengthen these partnerships even more in future.

My topic today is ‘Open Education Resources: next steps?’

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I will first look what we mean by OER. I will then give you two examples of OER development that the Commonwealth of Learning supports and will finally raise some questions about what we need to do to ensure that we take full advantage of this exciting new development and improve the quality of our educational systems so that we can participate more fully in the global knowledge economy.

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Let us first look at what we mean by OER.

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The open education resource may be seen to commence at the turn of the century and is based on the idea that knowledge is our common wealth and that technology can help us share, use and reuse it. MIT’s OpenCourseware initiative; Rice University’s Connexions, the OpenLearn, of the Open University of the UK, among others initiated this movement.

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What are OER? We are referring to OER not as open access hardware or software but to content which is free and freely available. This is digital, reusable and available for all levels, not just tertiary education.

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While there is no evidence yet to conclude that OER will be a panacea for our educational ills, there are some potential advantages, which include:

OER foster the exchange of global knowledge;

online collaborative OER development supports capacity building

collaborative OER development encourages the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge;
and

the availability of high-quality OER can raise the quality of education at all levels.

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Course authoring can take up to 80% of an academic's time.

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Collaboration can help academics save both course-authoring time and money

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It is clear that offering free content raises the profile of the university. It also encourages potential students to enroll. But what is interesting is that only 17% of educators use this free content. Most of it is used by the students

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As we've seen OER development started in American universities such as Rice and MIT. There were concerns that this may become yet another form of cultural imperialism and at the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO in 2009, there was a call for developing countries to contribute to this movement. And you can recognize two prominent South Africans, who led the charge: Prof Barney Pityana and Prof Brenda Gourley.

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Today many developing countries are increasingly investing in OER. Some of these initiatives are Sakshaat, the Indian Government's OER project, the China Open Resources for Education Initiative, Vietnam's Opencourseware and Japan Open Courseware Consortium.

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Fully aware of these developments, my own organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning has initiated several OER projects.

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The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is one of them. It is a consortium of 32 small states which have come together to develop capacity in online course development, develop courses that are freely available and offer these courses through existing tertiary-level institutions in the participating countries. Several need-based courses on "Disaster Management", "Tourism" 'Entrepreneurship development' "Linux for IT Managers" have been completed and are available on COL's website .

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The second COL initiative is a six-country partnership to develop 20 sets of course materials in print and online formats, based on the secondary curricula of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, came forward to support this work that combines the professional development of teachers with the development of OER. It is expected that providing high-quality course materials free of cost and enhancing the capacity of teachers will contribute to improving, among other things, the quality of secondary education in both open and conventional schools in the participating countries.

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What makes the COL approach particularly important is that it focuses not only on collaborative content development, but also on capacity building, and on creating communities of practice. Its not simply about cutting costs but also about improving the quality and effectiveness of higher education.

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So what are the emerging developments in OER?

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What impact are OER having on universities? Let me first take the example of the OERUniversity which is a collaboration between the University of Southern Queensland and Otago Polytechnic, which proposes to use OER to open up education to anyone anywhere in the world.

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This would mean that the students study using OER, voluntary tutors provide free support and students pay only if they wish to be assessed. The total cost would be only 20-25 % of what they would normally pay. OER are having an impact and could well be the wave of the future of higher education.

But then what are some of the questions that we need to address?

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Who are we developing the OER for? The fundamental players are the teachers and the students. How can we reach them in remote and marginalized communities? It is these communities that need most help to improve the quality of education. Many of them have not heard of OERs. How can we make them partners in this movement? Many educational institutions have traditional governance structures and teacher-centred pedagogic models. The OER initiative requires a learner-centred and decentralised approach. There is then a basic contradiction between the centralised and decentralised institutional models. Will the centralised structures allow a decentralised approach? What kind of advocacy strategies will be needed to reach these constituencies?

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Most of the available literature on OER focuses on production. How do we move to the next level and promote actual use and re-use? How will this help us achieve development outcomes?

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Finally, many strong players in OER have emerged in the different regions of the world. There are many international regional and national initiatives in OER. We have OER Africa, COL is working with UNESCO on policy advocacy, IDRC is working with Wawasan Open University on OER capacity building in Asia. How can these different groups come together as a network of stakeholders to enhance our collective impact?

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Let me conclude on that note and wish you well in your deliberations. Thank you for your attention.