

Assessing Students' Attitudes on OER-based Open Schooling for Non-Residents Bangladeshis (NRBs) in the Middle East Countries

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Abstract:

Now-a-days, open educational resources (OER) have been very powerful tool for imparting education in a cost-effective way for the students of diverse location. In line with this, Open School of Bangladesh Open University implements programmes for the non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) in the Middle East countries for skilling them using the OER. The aim of the present study is to assess the attitudes of students towards OER-based open schooling for the NRBs. The study used a survey approach to determine attitudes of 93 students towards OER-based open schooling. Attitude towards OER-based learning scale developed was used to collect the data. The findings of the study have been analyzed and discussed in details in the paper. The findings of the study reveal that there exists no significant difference in attitude towards online learning with respect to geographical dispersion. The findings of the study further reveal that use of self-integrated technologies has a significant effect on students' attitude towards OER-based learning.

1. Introduction

Open School of Bangladesh Open University (OS-BOU) uses open and distance learning (ODL) approach where self-learning materials (SLMs), face-to-face (F2F) contacts and videos through BOUTube. BOU stores learning resources, mainly SLMs and videos, in its OER (Open educational Resources) Repository. The School replaced the service of F2F contacts with the online tutorials and launched the open schooling programmes for the NRBs in the Middle East countries primarily in Saudi Arabia and Qatar leveraging the OER repository which is capable of providing the texts and videos. By this time, Open School already proctored the online examinations for the NRB students in South Korea. In this way, this programme is totally based on the Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL) which was sequel of Dean's declaration of paperless open schooling 5 (five) years before in an faculty seminar. After that one by one TEL activities came in place, say, OER repository, online tutorials, and online summative evaluations. Open School always passes through a study of its all initiatives. Launching Open School programmes were really challenging as it was initiated through a top-down approach without conducting any study. OER-based programme is somewhat different from open learning because it provides only contents for the students. On the other hand, open learning provides both content and education services. Open School provides online tutorials and online assessment which is very minimal. In this way, we can say NRB programme is mainly OER-based. Therefore, this research conducts a survey on attitudes towards OER-based open schooling for Non-Residents Bangladeshis (NRBs) in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

2. Literature

Feldstein et al. (2012) found that after implementation of the OER students of the business programme accessed digital textbooks than had previously purchased hard copies of textbooks. They also found higher grades were correlated with courses that used open textbooks. On the other hand, Holton et al. (2013) studied the views of the teachers at Scottsdale Community College and found that OER has great impact on post-secondary education and students' learning. Gil et al. (2013) surveyed students over a five year time, asking them to relate blogs that featured resources versus other blogs (all blogs were directly related to students' coursework). Thus, summarizing, it can be deduced from this study that the effectiveness of learning is better when OERs are jointly used. This study found a great evidence of usefulness of OERs in the learning process. Ozdemir and Hendricks (2017) examined faculty e-portfolios about their use of open textbooks and found faculties had been motivated for adopting an open textbook for their courses, and open textbooks were of cost saving to the students and impactful in achieving their learning outcomes. Faculties viewed in their study the cost saving is the main motivating factor for adopting OER textbooks, Similar views found from the students' end. In this study, they also reported that the quality of textbooks was as good as or better than that of traditional textbooks, and that students did as well or better in terms of learning outcomes and withdrawal rates compared to when the same courses were run with traditional textbooks. Hendricks et al. (2017) examined the use of OER in a physics course at the University of British Columbia, and found that the vast majority of survey respondents perceived the open textbook to be of the same or better quality than commercial textbooks used

in their other courses. Further, many of them appreciated the fact that the textbook was customized to this particular course—which is made possible by the use of a textbook with an open license. The OER movement has empowered academics to become innovative in their teaching through the openness and flexibility. Now, OER has been very cost-effective investment in quality teaching-learning. Sandanayake (2019) states that current learners are associated with the technology, and finds that learners OER-based blended learning for the undergraduate perceives the effective assessment activities. It is clear that most of the researches on the OER are of related to the usability and quality of materials. Users may have barriers to use open educational resources because it is the new addition of delivery of learning materials which is absolutely through digital technology. Henderson and Ostashevski (2018) found that barriers to OER include institutional policy, lack of incentives, and a need more support and education in the creating, using, and sharing of instructional materials. A major benefits to OER identified in their study is that educators is the continued collegial atmosphere of sharing and lifelong learning. Hassall, Lewis (2017) found that OER adoption and use can be enhanced through upgrading the quality of resources and institutional support of educators for motivating them for incorporating effective OER into their courses. Luo, et al. (2020) found that financial cost associated with the materials is not the barrier to adoption and use of OER; but put emphasis on consideration must be given to what extend OER will benefit the students' learning experiences. It is also considering factor of using the OER as the sole resource for a course or as a supplemental resource. They commented that any open educational practice is the notion of promoting the culture of openness which has huge pedagogical implications and involve student engagement. BOU Open School do not consider the financial cost of creating OER for the students, and it mainly focuses on creating culture of open practice within students, faculties and tutors as part of its mission of going paperless open schooling. It is time to know the NRB students are used to the culture of open practice of the Open School. This study concentrates on finding out the attitudes towards the usability, quality of resources and barriers.

3. Objectives

Open Educational Resources (OERs) comprises a wide range of formats of learning objects – online textbooks, videos, animations and simulations, digital graphics, some MOOCs, and even Powerpoint slides – and they are for free use by anyone. In line with this, BOU provides texts and videos for the learners through OER repository, and therefore, this study aims to rate the learners' attitude towards the OER repository they are currently using for their studies. This study achieves the following specific objectives:

- i) to ascertain the usability of the OER-repository by the Open School learners who are staying in the overseas countries for their livelihood;
- ii) to collect information on the quality of learning resources store in the repository;
- iii) to identify the barriers what they encounter while using the learning materials in the repository for their studies;
- iv) based one i) to ii), to suggests for further development of the OER-based programmes for the NRBs in different countries.

This article finds the following research questions:

1. *Is there any positive or negative experience of OER-based open schooling for NRBs who study in their courses staying at a diverse location, and in hardship life?*

Open School's NRB students are of labours who are working as factory hands, construction hands and so on which are, in fact, hard work particularly in the dessert countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Most of them became diaspora for changing their financial health particularly for helping the families. To run educational programmes through OER-based online setting for them is very challenging, and therefore, it is logical to find the answer this question.

2. *To want extent, the OER is of effective and feasible for open schooling system?*

The programme for NRBs was launched during the COVID 19, which is now subsidized, when BOU was closed for country-wide lockdown. The Open School had only option to use OER and online tutorials. Therefore, everything was of experimental, and based on 'trial and error'. In this way, to search for this question is appropriate.

4. Method

- i) *The participants*

The participants of the current research are of students of programmes of the BOU Open School who are staying in Saudi Arabia and Qatar as labour in the factories and construction work. Students are mainly virtually connected with the School. Required information is provided through WhatsApp group.

ii) Study design

Researchers created the Google form for the delivery of questionnaire. Link of the questionnaire was provided through WhatsApp groups to 144 male students (There is no female students). In addition, they were verbally communicated through WhatsApp and messenger phone for filling the questionnaires. In case of their missing call, SMS (short message service) were sent requesting them for filling the questionnaire. 93 students filled the form and the response rate was about 65%.

iii) The instrument

The current study used a 5-point Likert-scale structured questionnaire to collect students' views, and attitudes on BOU OER repository where their learning materials are kept for free use. To find out the perception data researchers arranged questionnaires like as Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree =1. SPSS statistical package has been used to analyze data and to draw conclusions. In this study, researchers had chosen 3 criteria separately: a) selected 11 statements in perceptions on Usability of Repository, b) selected 9 questions on Quality of Materials in Repository and c) chosen 7 questions in perception on barriers. Data are analyzed in an effort to explore the perceptions of learners regarding two types of videos. Mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for each item and compared. Scores have been used for describing collected data. In mean scores, higher scores implied the higher effectiveness of OER-based courses for students' learning and lower scores implied lower effectiveness.

5. Findings

i) Usability of Repository

Open Educational Resources (OERs) are any educational resources (which include curriculum maps, course materials, textbooks, streaming videos, multimedia applications, podcasts, vodcasts, and any other learning objects) are stored in the repository or in any other form for free use under a copyright licensing (UNESCO & COL, 2015). Therefore, any teaching-learning process can use textbook, sessions, lectures, assessments, and tests through OER which actually provides an institute a sort of platform for running a programme. Table 1 illustrates the attitude scale on usability of repository.

Table 1: Usability of Repository

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
BOU provides me with the link of OER Repository which contains all my study materials	3.92	1.07	Agree
I use the BOU repository for my studies	4.36	0.82	Agree
I get print of the texts and the use for my studies	2.89	1.21	Disagree
I mainly use the repository on my smartphone	4.47	0.7	Agree
Repository enhances quality of my learning	4.30	1.07	Agree
It promotes my interest for learning	4.00	1.03	Agree
I believe that BOU OER Repository has been very effective for NRBs	4.23	0.81	Agree
OER gave me new opportunity for learning	4.02	1.26	Agree
I suggest my friend to pursues OER-based studies at the BOU	4.02	1.21	Agree
I can read on screen and I prefer e-book rather printed book	3.21	0.99	Neutral
I also use other repository for additional studies	2.22	0.65	Disagree

Survey data presents that students have agreement on the issue of OER help them for their studies (mean 4.36 and SD 0.82) as the links are provided by the tutors (mean 3.92 and SD 1.07). The students use OER resources in their devices without getting print and they have disagreement of getting hard copy of resources (mean 2.89 and SD 1.21). Here it is necessary to mention that there is a dispersion of opinions as the SD scores 1.21. Most of the learner uses their

OER in the smartphone (mean 4.02 and 0.81) and has been effective for NRB students (mean 4.23 and SD 0.81), and OER has created a new opportunity for them. Students use BOU repository and they have disagreement of using other repository for their studies (mean 2.22 and SD 0.65). They are neutral of reading of printed books what the on-shore students using.

ii) Quality Materials in Repository

Similarly, OER allow textbook quality to be redefined through the lens of continuous improvement. Kimmons (2021). This lens ensures that the goal of producing textbooks is not just to publish a text but also to regularly review the content and update it according to students' needs and a changing world (Irvine et al. 2021). Table 3 illustrates the attitudes on the quality of materials in the repository.

Table 2: Quality Materials in Repository

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
OER resources are the hardcopy of BOU books	4.22	0.92	Agree
Materials are of easily understandable	3.90	1.12	Agree
I use both texts and video from the repository	4.14	1.31	Agree
Videos uses enough animations to make it understandable	2.96	1.4	Disagree
Videos are supplement to the texts, and curriculum-linked	3.44	0.88	Agree
Tutors are the main anchors of the videos to whom I meet in the online tutors	4.15	1.10	Agree
I already used to Facebook and I feel comfortable to use repository	4.13	1.11	Agree
BOU repository is in mother tongue/Bangla and easy to catch up	4.05	1.29	Agree

Students are well-informed about the hardcopy of BOU books are placed in the OER repository and their agreement towards this statement is positive (mean 4.22 and SD 0.92) , and the books are easily understandable (mean 3.90 and SD 1.12). Students use the video along with the texts (mean 4.14 and SD 1.31) where they have disagreement on the statement of ‘videos are of appropriately animated’. But hey have agreement towards the tutor made videos are of curriculum linked (mean 3.44 and 0.88). All learning resources are friendly to them as they are made of mother tongue (mean 4.05 and SD 1.29).

iii) Barriers

OER is becoming an appropriate tool in teaching-learning. Hassall and Lewis (2017) identified three key barriers – i) lack of awareness of OER, ii) lack of motivation to use of OER, and iii) lack of training tin use of OER. In spite of that use of OER did not vary with the self-evaluated skill with technology, not with support from institutions, but educator did practice OER more if they were aware of greater range of resources. On the other hand, Mtebe and Raisamo (2014) did not consider that lack of trust in others’ resources, lack of interest in creating and/or using OER, and lack of time to find suitable materials are not the barriers of OER. But they found main barrier lies on assisting those who are involved in OER implementation to find mitigating strategies that will maximize their usage. Table 3 illustrates the attitudes towards the barriers in using the repository.

Table 3: Barriers in using the repository

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
I have less time to locate materials in the BOU repository	4.05	1.21	Agree
I have lack of ability to access and integrate BOU repository in my/our courses	3.98	1.18	Agree
I have lack of internet connectivity where I stay	2.51	0.9	Disagree
I have facility to get print of BOU books	2.90	0.86	Disagree
It costs me huge as it consumes huge data	3.55	1.23	Agree
I take my friend’s help for using repository	2.70	1.03	Disagree
I have problem in attending online classes	3.97	0.95	Agree
My tutors provides all sorts of study information	4.19	0.91	Agree

The results indicate that students face some barriers in using the BOU repository which they reported are less time to locate repository (mean 4.05) which, in turn, is of dispersion of opinions as the SD scores 1.21. They have agreement towards lacking ability of access and integrate OER for their studies but the mean score is slightly low (mean 3.98). They have disagreement towards the statement of “I have lack of internet connectivity where I stay”, ‘I have facility to get print of BOU books’ and ‘I take my friend’s help for using repository” . They have opportunity of asking solution during the tutorial classes.

6. Conclusion

NRB students agree that OER is clearly beneficial for their studies. However, they have some barriers which are lack of support, technological tools, quality, skills in using the OER, they perceived that this is very innovative way that they had the opportunity for studies even staying in other countries and passing a hardship life. They have already been used to uploading learning materials from the OER repository, and they can eliminate through taking help from tutors and friends. BOU can increase students’ educational opportunities and quality of learning resources and increase their impact on the NRB of other countries.

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