

BOOK REVIEW

Promoting Use and Contribution of Open Educational Resources

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The current movement toward Open Educational Resources (OER) has a long historical precedence in the open education movements including that of the provision of equality of educational opportunity, recognising, though, that two individuals, not even twins, learn the same way. This later became a more contentious issue for the designers of OER as well as the planners with regard to, respectively: how best to serve the individual learning styles of learners, and what could be the cost-efficiency of alternative learning resources, including OERs.

The above unresolved issues notwithstanding, the promise of OER (and subsequently MOOCs as a part of OER and the OER movement), starting from UNESCO's coinage of the term and MIT's opening up of large numbers of courses for free, and subsequent initiatives by UKOU, IGNOU, COL, EdX, Corsera, Udacity, Khan Academy and many others, has generated considerable enthusiasm in policy makers as well as academic leaders and teachers. 'Open sharing' has been a foundational issue for large-scale use of OER; and it is as much personal as systemic. Therefore, it is imperative that these and a multitude of dimensions need to be rigorously examined through research for its effective / productive use of OER. The now-recognised debate on adoption and use of ICT through the "dominant diffusion model of the past, and the social shaping model of the recent times" may help us appreciate how best OER can be leveraged to derive the most utility. The end-user is the key to OER theory and practice.

It is in this context that the current research undertaken by Dr Mishra could be located. Teachers, as practitioners, are a sceptical lot, who need to be convinced that something is worth doing; need to be facilitated in how best to do it; and, most importantly, need a 'system' within which such a seamless activity can be undertaken. These are critical issues which need to be addressed; and the current research assumes considerable significance inasmuch as it has tried to comprehensively examine the issue from a variety of dimensions.

The research, as part of ROER4D network and funded by IDRC (Canada), is very timely, and addresses how best OERs can be used / reused more effectively by both contributors and non-users. The study was conducted on 148 Indian college and university teachers (finally, 117 questionnaires and interviews could be analysed), who attended four interactive workshops on OER by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in four regions of the country. The interactive sessions included: just-a-minute sessions, interactive quiz sessions, snowball sessions, and panel discussions. A structured Attitude Towards Open Educational Resources (ATOER) scale,



developed by Mishra et al (2016), was used in this study. The scale was further standardised through factor analysis, and 17 statements (13 on sharing, and 4 on adaptation) were finally used. The study focused on four variables: attitudes, motivations, barriers, and quality – within a well-structured research framework derived from the Activity Theory of Engestrom (1987) and the idea of mediating tool advocated by Vygotsky (1978).

While fully establishing the reliability and validity of the research instruments, the researcher has also adopted appropriate statistical tools to analyse data – both quantitative and qualitative. The quadrant used for analysis included: contributor-noncontributor-user-nonuser. The findings suggest that: i) though teachers generally have a positive attitude toward OER and are happy to ‘share’, they are not as much willing to use OER of others; ii) the most important user-motivation was willingness to share, followed by learning opportunities, collaboration and professional image, though, ‘learning effectiveness of students’ could not be identified as a motivator; iii) for perception of quality of OER, authenticity was a major factor, followed by appropriateness to current teaching-learning and localisation of content; iv) the major barriers included lack of knowledge about licensing and copyright issues, current teaching workload, lack of technical support, and absence of OER policy; and v) the regression analysis results indicate that the displayed positive attitude was highly influenced by opportunities of partnership, learning and recognition opportunities, and the philosophy of reaching-the-unreached.

This is a comprehensive and well-designed study, and was conducted within a well-articulated framework, useful for both policy analysis as well institutional and faculty adoption of OER. More research, though, is needed to further crystalise how best OER can address the twin pillars of higher education in India today – numbers on one hand, to increase GER; and quality on the other hand, to achieve employability and happy living. Some research outputs by the reviewer, in collaboration with colleagues from Asia (Chen & Panda, 2012; Santosh & Panda, 2016; Panda & Santosh, 2017), may be of use to interpret the findings of Dr Mishra in context. I shall also suggest relating this study to Dr Mishra’s recent well-articulated paper on OER (Mishra, 2017).

We need to focus also on some very interesting findings vis-à-vis unanswered questions. Why does a positive attitude toward OER not lead to actual use of OER? Is professional ethics anything to do with use of OER? Why is it that the prime factor of student actual use and learning effectiveness is not a significant motivator? Could important motivation factors include: i) Factoring of OERs in the API and promotion? ii) Who shares the cost of developing OER? iii) When one’s own OER is sharable, why bring in the issue of authentication of OER developed by others? How could private and some profit-making institutions use OERs to their advantage, and why are public institutions lagging behind? The researcher’s quadrant of types of OER practitioners (Figure on p. 12) further suggests that it is important to study a very important part of the quadrant, i.e., Why does one think of contributing, but not using OER? This is very disturbing. Furthermore, the model for promoting OER in India (Figure on p. 119) is highly appreciated. Experience tells us that lack of a ‘system’ is the major constraint in so far as use of ICT, including MOOCs and OER, in India is concerned. The system and culture of seamless facilitation and blending of ICTs and OER in teaching-learning, professional development including performance appraisal, and institutional accreditation is lacking. This needs further articulation.

However, this reported research is a very significant contribution to OER literature. I must note, not only that this is a significant addition to OER research literature, but also that the well-articulated research framework adopted by the researcher is worth consideration for future OER studies.

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