

TOWARDS OPEN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES WITH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

The Open Educational Resources (OER) movement has empowered teachers to become more innovative in their pedagogical practices, through the openness and flexibility in educational resource use permitted by open licensing of materials. The 5Rs of openness in OER - Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute (Wiley, 2014), enable user engagement in innovative use of resources moving beyond mere „access“ to them, resulting in „Open Educational Practices“ (OEP) (Ehlers, 2011). Nevertheless, teachers“ adoption of OER in such a manner will necessitate a „change“ in their pedagogical thinking and actions.

The Faculty of Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka is implementing a research project engaging student teachers of its Postgraduate Diploma in Education Programme to integrate OER in their teaching-learning process and studying its impact. The study is conducted at nine Centres of OUSL representing the nine provinces of the country. The study adopts a design-based research approach, which is a systematic and flexible methodology aimed at improving educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation (Reeves, 2006). During an intervention programme designed and implemented in several stages, various aspects in relation to adoption of OER by teachers are examined through multiple strategies of data collection and analysis. Self-reflections of the participants is a key strategy adopted throughout the study to unfold the ideas, thoughts and feelings of the participants reflecting on their experiences during the intervention process. This paper focuses on investigating how and to what extent a designed reflective practice process can support enacting „change“ in teachers“ pedagogical practices towards OEP.

Conceptual framework:

The significance of reflective practice in the teaching profession has been widely discussed and well-researched. While reflection is a form of mental processing that is used to fulfil a purpose, reflective learning emphasizes the intention to learn from current or prior experience (Moon, 2013). Through a reflective practice process the insights and learning gained through experiences can be used by the practitioners to continuously learn, grow and develop in and through practice. The notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action allows practitioners to engage in a process of continuous learning through critical reflection.

Among various models that have been presented to establish a structure for reflection, Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper (2001) provides a simple framework that adapted Borton“s (1970) developmental model of reflective practice which composes three questions to the practitioner: *What, So what, and Now what?* This framework allows practitioners to analyze an experience by first describing a situation, then examine what has been learnt through the experience, and subsequently reflect on ways in which they can personally improve and the consequences of their actions. This framework guided designing the reflective practice process in the study and analyzing its effect on changing teachers“ pedagogical practices. According to Rolfe et al. (2001) framework: „What?“ describes the situation; achievements,

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consequences, responses, feelings, and problems; ‘So what?’ – discusses what has been learnt; learning about self, relationships, models, attitudes, cultures, actions, thoughts, understanding, and improvements; and ‘Now what?’ identifies what needs to be done in order to improve future outcomes, and develop learning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Research Questions

The study adopted a naturalistic inquiry under the qualitative research approach. The key objective of the study was to investigate how and to what extent, a designed reflective practice process supported enacting change in teachers’ pedagogical practices towards OEP, during the intervention programme on integration of OER in the teaching-learning process. The following specific research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What are the changes that had occurred in pedagogical thinking and practices of teachers as revealed by their reflections?
2. How has the designed reflective practice process affected enacting change in teachers’ pedagogical practices towards OEP?

Participants

The participants constituted 85 student teachers from nine OUSL Centres – Anuradhapura, Badulla, Batticaloa, Colombo, Jaffna, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matara, Ratnapura, clustered in 22 small groups as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1. The participants

Centre	Anu.	Bad.	Bat.	Col.	Jaf.	Kan.	Kur.	Mat.	Rat.	Total
No. of Participants	06	02	24	04	23	11	04	06	05	85
No. of Groups	02	01	04	02	05	02	02	02	02	22

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The key method of data collection was via self-reflective narratives written by the participant groups, in the form of ‘stories’, during the evaluation workshops titled ‘Tell Us Your Story – Becoming Reflective Practitioners’, held at each Centre. Participants were provided with guidelines and a structure to write their narratives. They were requested to work in small groups, writing a story of their collaborative journey in ‘Integrating OER in teaching and Learning’, in any language they were comfortable with, reflecting on their perceptions and perspectives about OER, any changes in their thinking, teaching practices, and impacts on their teaching-learning process. To facilitate their reflective thinking and writing process, a template with some trigger questions was provided (see Table 2).

‘Narrative analysis’ of teachers’ stories was conducted using a ‘thematic analysis’, coding and categorizing various aspects of the accounts that were told (Reissman, 2008), discovering patterns and developing themes. These were then organized based on Rolfe et al. (2001) framework, providing a causal link among ideas that made sense. This process helped to ascertain the changes that had occurred, mainly in the pedagogical thinking and practices of teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged during the narrative analysis of 22 stories are presented in Table 2, according to the Rolfe et al. (2001) framework on reflective practice, with supportive quotes.

Table 2. Summary of data analysis on reflective practice

Frame work	Questions	Themes	Supportive Quotes (Examples)
“What”	What were your first impressions on OER?	Novel Concept	<i>First time we heard about OER... They are attractive, easy, low cost, and freely available resources... Vast amount of materials at a click... A ‘gold mine’ ... Helpful to improve access to learning opportunities.</i>
“What	What is the starting point of OER adoption?	OER Workshop	<i>We started to use OER as teaching materials after the first workshop ... Came to know about copyrights, CC licenses, 4Rs ... Realized that downloading and using materials from the Internet without any regard to the ownership of those resources is a wrong practice.</i>
“So what”	How did you adopt/integrate OER? (What are the different ways?)	Teaching-learning activities	<i>Used different forms of OERs such as animations, diagrams, activities, video clips as teaching aids... Linked OERs at every step of lessons ... introduction of the concepts, engagement, elaboration, evaluation, making activity cards, question papers ...etc.</i>
“What”	What are the challenges/ frustrations you faced?	Challenges	<i>Spent lot of time to find and integrate OERs... Truly time consuming and a little tedious task in making sure about the relevance, standard, quality... Lack of computers and internet facilities at schools, technical issues... Most OER were available only in English.</i>
“So what”	How did you deal with these challenges?	Solutions	<i>Faced barriers with great enthusiasm... Got help from colleagues... Trained students to find and use OER... Used home computers... Translated OER to Tamil/Sinhala... Created our own OER.</i>
“What”	What were your achievements/s successes?	Achievements	<i>Published a handbook on OER links for selected subjects... Conducted workshops at schools to raise awareness... Motivated peers to use OER... Made CDs with OER and distributed... Forming a student group of ‘self-learners’ who search and share OER.</i>
“So what”	What are your feelings about the successes?	Feelings	<i>Happy and satisfied... Felt we have offered a valuable contribution for the development of our education field... Happy to get appreciations of the school society... Happy to see the motivation of students.</i>
“Now what”	What did you learn during the process?	Insights	<i>Motivated self-learning of students as well as teachers... Reduced educational costs... Increased access to materials... Provided free sharing and collaborative opportunities... Productive... Enhanced the quality of education.</i>
“Now what”	What are any good practices?	Good practices	<i>Change and modify OER according to our purposes... Sharing knowledge, skills and resources with colleagues... Creating OER in our mother tongue.</i>
“Now what”	What are the impacts on the teaching and learning process	Impacts	<i>Integration of OER made our teaching interesting, challenging, creative, attractive... Increased students’ interest, active participation and motivation... Able to change from traditional teaching methods... Enhanced our teaching skills... Teach with more self-confidence... Enhanced sharing culture.</i>
“Now what”	What are your future plans?	Future plans	<i>Revise and remix available OER according to the requirements... Create and share OERs in Tamil/ Sinhala... Introduce OER as self-learning materials. ...Awareness raising activities... Promote OER use.</i>

The critical analysis of narratives revealed that a significant amount of changes had occurred in pedagogical thinking and practices of teachers. As evident by data presented in Table 2, exposure to the novel concept of OER has resulted not only in developing teachers' knowledge and skills in searching, identifying and integrating OER in their teaching-learning process, but also a range of new insights and good practices. The findings also denote that the designed reflective practice process has stimulated teachers to re-examine and think purposefully about shifts in their thinking and practices that had occurred during the process („What“ and „So what“), and discuss about them meaningfully and plan for further improvements („Now what“), moving towards a positive change. The trigger questions have supported teachers to engage in a deeper and meaningful reflective process and a more in-depth enquiry. The identification and description of the activities, analyzing and evaluating feelings and discussing about the effects of actions has guided them to consider implications leading to the formulation of action plans for the future.

For instance, through the awareness of OER, and having free and open access to a pool of varied resources with permission to reuse/revise/remix/redistribute without any legal issues has resulted in changing their thinking and practices from traditional methods of teaching and resource use, enhancing creativity, innovative thinking, as well as a sharing culture. Further, they are challenged, encouraged and motivated to engage in integration of OER in a more productive manner in their future activities. Such use, creation and management of OER via innovative pedagogical methods stress the notion of OEP (Ehlers, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Reflection and practice have nurtured each other in this context. Reflective practice, as an active process that happens in real time, dealing with real, complex situations (Moon, 2013), has assisted teachers to analytically examine between their thinking and practices during the process promoting a conceptual change in pedagogical thinking and pedagogical practices towards OEP. Hence, it was evident that the designed reflective practice process has affected enacting change in teachers' pedagogical practices towards OEP.

KEY WORDS

Open Educational Practices, Open Educational Resources, Reflective Practice, Pedagogical Thinking, Pedagogical Practices

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