

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS ON THE USE OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

Open Educational Resources (OER) are described as teaching, learning and research materials in any medium that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use, and in some instances, re-purposing by others (UNESCO, 2002). Open licensing allows users rights to re-use, combine and modify any original work, while allowing authors to have their work acknowledged (Creative Commons, 2004). Realizing their potential benefits in education, there is a rapidly growing interest among educators worldwide, in promoting use of OER in teaching and learning.

Adaptation of OER can be a cost effective way for instructional material development. Since development of new course content would be both expensive and time consuming, it would be far more beneficial for educators to adopt and adapt OER, rather than duplicating already available materials. OER are claimed to make a significant contribution in education by making educational resources easily available, thus contributing to transparency and improvement of quality in education systems (UNESCO, 2002).

During the recent past there has been a constantly growing supply of OER materials available on the Internet, both as formal course materials as well as informal, non-course materials (Hatakka, 2009). These may include a variety of resources such as full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, research articles and multimedia. However, it is observed that a vast majority of open content are produced in developed countries, while there are only some open content initiatives reported from developing countries (Wiley, 2006). It has been revealed that several inhibiting factors prevent course designers from using OER, such as, educational rules and restrictions, English language problems, lack of relevance, difficulty in access, problems with technical resources, concerns about quality, concerns about copyright issues, lack of awareness, limitations in computer literacy, teaching capacity and teaching practices and traditions (Hatakka, 2009). This implies the need of raising awareness among educators about OER and encouraging their use and creation of OER, if the advantages of OER to be realized.

This study aimed at finding out perceptions of Sri Lankan teachers and teacher educators on the use of OER in the process of teaching and learning.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the extent to which teachers and teacher educators are aware about Open Educational Resources (OER)
2. To identify current practices of teachers and teacher educators on sharing educational resources in their teaching learning process
3. To find out their attitudes on sharing educational resources in teaching and learning
4. To identify appropriate measures to facilitate use of OERs by teachers and teacher educators

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METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using the survey method. The participants of the study consisted of personnel employed in the field of education, including teachers, principals and teacher educators. Descriptive data were collected by administering a questionnaire including an attitude scale, and by conducting three focus group interviews with selected sub samples. Out of 150 questionnaires distributed, only 72 were returned (48% response rate), and only 53 respondents (35%) have completed the attitude scale. Quantitative methods using percentages and qualitative methods using coding and categorizing were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were teachers, principles or teacher educators, majority being females (70.8%) and below 40 years of age (55.5%). A high majority (96%) has claimed having either excellent or average proficiency in English language as well as in computer use.

As revealed by questionnaire data, the term Open Educational Resources (OER) had meant to the participants in different ways such as; “Resources that are freely available to be used by anyone”, “Shared educational resources” and “digital materials that can be re-used for teaching/learning/research...etc”. The key words emerged from their definitions were “free”, “shared”, “open” and “available”. However, a majority of them (72.2%) had either never heard of OER before or had no prior experience in using them. A small percentage (27.8%) claimed awareness of certain OER initiatives such as OCW, MIT, MERLOT and JORUM, and has used some OERs for various purposes such as, “to find resources to help teaching”, “to make presentations” and “to improve knowledge”.

Several current practices of sharing educational resources in their teaching-learning process were indicated by the participants. It was interesting to note that while a large percentage (95.8%) use resources that were originated by someone else and borrowed from the Internet, only 58.3 % allow resources developed by them to be freely used or shared by any others. Even when these materials are shared, it was often only with close academic colleagues in the same Section/Institution. This indicates reluctance among the participants in sharing their own resources, yet a tendency to borrow resources from the Internet, which have been developed by someone else. Nevertheless, the analysis of the responses to the attitude scale which included both positive and negative statements indicated that overall, a majority had a very positive attitude on sharing educational resources, as evident by some of the results presented in Table 1.

Aspect	Statements	Extremely /To a great extent (%)	Mod erate ly(%)	Just a little (%) Not at all
How do you feel about sharing educational resources?	I'd be happy for someone to adapt my materials (P)	53.9	34.6	11.5
	It enhances my reputation as a good teacher (P)	74.5	19.6	5.9
	Sharing resources would save time and money (P)	76.5	17.6	5.9
	Why give away resources to other institutions? (N)	20.5	38.6	40.9
	I would not want other people changing my resources (N)	39.2	23.5	37.3
	I don't wish to share resources that I have spent long time preparing (N)	15.1	22.6	62.3
How do you feel about using educational resources developed by others?	Borrowing resources saves time and money (P)	49.1	37.7	13.2
	I trust my colleagues won't make mistakes in their resources (P)	36.0	30.0	34.0
	I prefer to work individually and use my own resources (N)	29.8	38.4	29.8
	I don't like using others' resources as they need re-working (N)	24.5	42.8	32.7

Table 1: Attitudes of participants on sharing and using educational resources

There is an overall positive attitude on certain statements related to sharing OER, such as “It enhances my reputation as a good teacher”, and “Sharing resources would save time and money”. Despite this fact, it was also obvious that there were almost equal positive, negative and moderate responses distributed for certain statements on sharing OERs such as “Why give away resources to other institutions?” as well as for statements on using OERs such as, “I prefer to work individually and use my own resources” and “I don’t like using others’ resources as they need re-working”. This again implies a reluctance of participants to share their materials freely.

However, it was encouraging to note that a majority of the participants were in favor of facilitating a more of an OER culture within the educational institutions. A significant percentage has indicated a positive trend by agreeing extremely or to a great extent to have restricted repositories within their institution (55%), use external repositories already available (60%), need of incentives for those who develop resources (65%), and need for staff development on OER (40%). Analysis of qualitative data further confirmed these strategies as appropriate measures to facilitate use of OER by teachers and teacher educators.

During the focus group discussions, it was revealed that all participants in the three sub-groups unanimously agreed that the concept of OERs is very useful in education. They provided various reasons such as “time-saving”, “cost-effective”, “accessible by any one/any time/any where”, and “opportunity to share innovative resources”. However, there were also several common concerns raised by the participants, regarding the free use and sharing of resources. One major concern was about the “quality” and the “relevance” of the OERs in their own contexts. Yet, it was also pointed out by one participant that the teachers themselves have a responsibility of finding appropriate resources, and adapting them according to their needs. Further, there was a concern raised by another participant about one teacher putting a significant effort in developing a good resource, while another may just use it without any effort. It was also suggested that this practice may “inhibit creativity and innovativeness” among teachers as well. It was indicated by all participants that acknowledgement of the original author is essentially needed, and that copyrights should be maintained, whenever OER are being used.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept of OER is still new to Sri Lankan teachers and educators, and their awareness on OER was found to be very low. While the participants indicated an overall positive attitude about using OER for teaching and learning, they were less comfortable in sharing their own content with others. Concerns over copyrights and ethical issues, as well as on quality, reliability and adaptability of OER were prominent. Raising awareness and developing a positive attitude about using and sharing OER were identified by them as essential needs, and suggestions were made to provide opportunities for educators to gain experience in using and creating OER and to integrate OER into their teaching-learning process.

In order to facilitate the use and creation of OER by teachers and teacher educators, it is crucial to inculcate a positive attitude among them on sharing resources. This will be possible through various strategies that could be implemented at institutional level, such as awareness raising and training programmes, policy decisions on using, creating and integrating OER, as well as recognition and appreciation of OER initiatives of their staff.

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