

OER in non-English-speaking countries: challenges and opportunities

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Sub-theme 1: Collaboration

OER in Non-English-speaking Countries: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The paper summarizes the results of the project implemented since 2010 by the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) to advocate the OER movement and build the capacity in production, sharing and use of OER in UNESCO Member States, in particular, in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Baltic States and other non-English-speaking countries. The project activities build on the results of examination of the needs, capacities, opportunities and challenges for the production and use of OER in the selected countries. Particular attention is paid to the exploration best practices, raising awareness of open licenses and analysis of the obstacles hindering the dissemination of open digital content. The surveys of the state-of-the-art, challenges and prospects for the development of OER provided a further insight into how OER-related patterns vary in non-English-speaking countries. As a result, recommendations for the promotion of Open Educational Resources tailored to the context of specific countries, for example, Brazil, China, France, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, etc. were proposed. In addition to implications for the education policies, the issues related to transformation of pedagogical practice to ensure stronger emphasis on collaborative approaches and quality assurance through rating OER were studied as well.

The paper is concluded by the description of an OER project (2013 – 2017) implemented in Kyrgyzstan with the support of the Kyrgyzstan Soros Foundation.

Keywords: Open Educational Resources, Massive Open Online Courses

Introduction

Since 2010 the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) has been implementing a project on Open Educational Resources in non-English-speaking countries. The project is aimed at advocating the OER movement and building the capacity in production, sharing and use of OER in UNESCO Member States, in particular, in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Baltic States and other non-English-speaking countries. The project activities build on the results of examination of the needs, capacities, opportunities

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and challenges for the production and use of OER in the selected countries. The focus is on the exploration and dissemination of best practices, raising awareness of open licenses and development of recommendations for a wider use of OER in educational practice. At its initial stage the project was focused on educational content in the Russian and national languages and involved most CIS and Baltic States. The state-of-the-art, challenges and prospects for the development of OER were studied in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Armenia, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, as well as in Latvia and Lithuania. The surveys covered national policy for ICTs in education with a focus on OER-related issues, the current state of advancement of educational content, major achievements, challenges, and obstacles, including technological and IPR aspects. A synthesis report “CIS on the Way towards Open Educational Resources” provided recommendations for expanding the use of OER.

In 2011 – 2014, the geographical scope of the project expanded to include Japan, People’s Republic of China, Brazil, Turkey and Vietnam. These surveys provided a further insight into how OER-related patterns vary in non-English-speaking countries. IITE published the case studies on OER in Brazil, China, Lithuania, Russia and Poland. Three policy briefs related to open educational content were published by UNESCO IITE: “Global trends in the development and use of open educational resources to reform educational practices”, “Open educational resources and intellectual property rights” and “Introduction to MOOCs: Avalanche, Illusion or Augmentation?”.

The results of analysis of expert opinions in non-English-speaking countries make it possible to conclude that much effort is needed to raise awareness about OER and to promote the production and use of OER in these countries. The overall study has shown that special emphasis needs to be placed on integration of, and networking within, the target communities themselves as well as within the wider international OER communities and networks.

The survey of expert opinions confirmed the most frequently mentioned factors that appear to prevent wider introduction of OER into educational practices in the surveyed countries:

- National/institutional strategies for the informatization (application of ICT) of education are mainly oriented towards infrastructure and seldom encourage the development of educational content.
- Educators lack awareness about the availability of OER and the opportunities they provide.
- Most people are not familiar with intellectual property rights issues; national IPR regulations are currently incompatible with open licenses.
- Emerging pedagogical approaches are yet to be adopted by educators and HEIs.
- Quality assessment and assurance provisions for OER as being academically and/or pedagogically sound do not exist.
- The reward/encouragement system for introducing OER into the educational practice is non-existent at educational institutions, and the provision of educational content is not considered during instructors’ performance evaluations.

To harness the potential of OER for transforming educational practices, the major challenges to be tackled are:

- Awareness and promotion of OER and open licenses.
- Education strategy, regulation and financing.
- ICT infrastructure and skills.
- Pedagogy, curriculum and quality standards.
- Fostering an attitude of sharing.

These findings make it possible to recommend the ways in which OER could be better promoted across the CIS, and which may have wider relevance in other countries around the world. Generally, the OER movement needs to develop through both top-down and bottom-up initiatives: strategic decisions should be taken at the national level, administrative decisions at the institutional level, and the activities of educators should complement both levels.

Government strategy and government-supported initiatives are needed to encourage publicly funded HEIs to collaborate in sharing their educational resources and to provide the necessary infrastructure and support. In line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recommendations formulated in *Giving Knowledge for Free* (OECD & CERI, 2007), it is important to ensure comprehension, at all levels, that *academic and research output, as well as the national cultural heritage, made available in digital format with the use of public funds should also be available for education, at no cost.*

Public funding should be allocated to provide the ICT infrastructure, but also for production of educational content, maintenance of OER repositories, and acquisition of adequate ICT skills appropriate to producing and sharing OER. Further, governments should support national OER initiatives, as well as the establishment of national consortia of OER/OCW HEIs, or work internationally by encouraging institutions to join the global OpenCourseWare Consortium, Coursera, etc. More specifically for the CIS countries, as they share common educational traditions, the OER movement could be supported at the Commonwealth level, in the same way as the Commonwealth of Learning does for the Commonwealth of Nations.

UNESCO IITE has translated into the Russian language the Guidelines for OER in Higher Education developed by UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (UNESCO & COL, 2011) and "The Open Education Resources (OER) Country Policy Development Template" to help develop guidelines for OER promotion in the CIS. The Guidelines should, however, be aligned with the national context of specific CIS countries and include specific recommendations for different stakeholders. In particular, the recommendations should envisage revised policies and standards regulating higher education. They should envisage financial mechanisms to create and enable environments for the production and use of OER, as well as capacity-building and awareness-raising on OER issues. The guidelines should provide recommendations for wider use of open licensing and open format

standards and address the issues of curriculum design and measures aimed at ensuring the adoption of new pedagogical approaches.

In addition, governments need to take immediate steps to align national copyright and IPR legislation and regulations with open licenses. It is important to have the copyright status of educational materials explicitly stated in educational portals when they are published, so that users can be clear of their legal status. Encouragement of a wider use of OER requires promotion of the idea of “openness” the concept of sharing, reusing, adapting, readapting, translating and localising educational resources among educators, learners and the general public by governments and institutions alike. This strategy should focus on actions to promote the OER movement in and across all these countries. In particular, more OER needs to be available in the titular languages or Russian, because in many CIS countries the English proficiency of the majority of students is not sufficient for them to use English-language educational resources.

Institutions and teachers need to promote and support learner-centred pedagogical approaches that rely on educational resources as much as direct teacher instruction. Institutions will need to provide training and development for their teaching staff, and both recognise and reward teachers who develop and publish good OER. Teachers will need to investigate and adopt new teaching practices that encourage learner-centered pedagogical approaches, which use new technologies and require greater co-operation.

Kyrgyzstan Case Study

Kyrgyzstan Soros Foundation introduced a road map (2013 – 2017) for OER in Kyrgyzstan and is now implementing it. The main focus is given to OER for schools, universities, and science. OER promotion has several main focuses: national legislation, working with government structures, improving ICT infrastructure, creating or translating available materials into local languages, and showing teachers how to use these new possibilities in their everyday job.

At the moment, the project passes through the stage of amendments and reforms in Kyrgyzstan legislation, which are aimed at meeting the OER concept. However, legislation is not the only obstacle to overcome: many years shall pass away before this idea is ready for implementation and integration. Under the roadmap, books, video lessons, and interactive courses should be produced, while the available OER materials shall be translated into local languages. The changes in the current legislation will take some time, though the government had taken into account the OER principles, while the society began to actively use new opportunities, taking an active role in their expansion and improvements.

In recent years in Kyrgyzstan, we can see new young players with new ideas in providing educational materials created under Creative Commons or similar licenses. For example, projects, like Tili. kg (online portal for learning Kyrgyz) that has been created by several software developers from Kyrgyzstan. They created all content and made the source codes of their website and mobile apps available to anyone under the CC license on GitHub website. This is a positive influence, as more and more teams are beginning to work in the same direction, creating free materials that are accessible to all users without any restrictions. This idea is becoming more popular in our society and among younger generation.

Now Kyrgyzstan experiences the lack of paper-based books for schools and universities and the lack of qualified teachers and instructors, especially in rural regions. Meanwhile, the quality of the printed materials leaves a lot to be desired. Another problem is the mindset of people living in the CIS countries, whose understanding of education should be changed according to new open possibilities. Pursuant to recent surveys, teachers' will to use new digital educational materials is very low. Having many OERs is not enough, as we should also stimulate and show teachers how to use them.

Another problem in Kyrgyzstan is ICT infrastructure in schools and teachers' knowledge of ICT tools. There is insufficient number of PCs for students and less than 10% of schools have the Internet access. In general, Kyrgyzstan ICT infrastructure is ready to use OER and in the next few years, the situation in schools is expected to change due to tablets and smartphones that are becoming more affordable for both students and teachers.

Creation and implementation of the OER principles in Kyrgyzstan will help overcome numerous problems stated above, and bring education in the country to a new level. The results of the current work will be available only in 5-10 years; that is why it is so important to promote the idea of OER for its successful implementation in the near future.

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