

# Institutional frameworks for quality assurance of OER

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## Institutional Frameworks for Quality Assurance of OER

*"The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing  
is sufficient to solve most of world problems" Mahatma Ghandi*

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### The Context

Education is a social practice. The changing teaching learning practices are the products of historical contexts and changing social, economic and political systems. The Open Educational Resources (OER) i.e., the educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared, are the products of their times. We are living in the age of democracy. The beginnings of OER movement is primarily motivated by the democratic ideal that knowledge is the common wealth of humankind and should be freely shared. John Dewey's discourse on 'Democracy and Education' interface is reflected in current times in the form of citizen-centric polity promoting learner-centric education. The revolutionary developments in information and communication technologies enabled to have greater reliance on open resources-based learning. The changing social context, technological revolution and philosophical orientation of OER provide the context for the appreciation of quality initiatives in OER.

### The Focus

Quality, as **fit of purpose** and **fit for purpose**, defines the relevance of OER. These two dimensions of quality i.e., goals and objectives of quality reflected in the expression of quality as **fit of purpose** and inputs, processes and expected outcomes of quality reflected in the expression of quality as **fit for purpose** captures the totality of quality concerns of OER. The institutional frameworks at two levels i.e., internal institutional systems of quality assurance and external systems of quality assessment of OER quality, play an important role in realising different dimensions of OER quality. The discussion in this presentation mainly focuses on these different dimensions of quality and appropriateness of varied institutional arrangement for ensuring and assessing quality. At the end some questions are raised for discussion.

This is a presentation of a **reflective professional** having varied work experiences in Indian Open Universities and Indian National Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agency.

## Quality as Fit of Purpose

The two critical questions in quality assessment are:

- i. Are we identifying the right aspects for quality assessment? and
- ii. Are we assessing quality in right ways?

These questions are equally relevant to OER. The nature and objectives of OER quality assessment provide the answer to first section. In addition to the broad goals of education, the OER is expected to:

- transform educational practices by adopting open learning architecture;
- liberalise and democratise knowledge;
- combine formal and informal learning;
- combine construction and sharing of knowledge resources;
- provide access to quality learning resources by external validation as all resources are shared and possibility for feedback is opened; and
- enable the change of educational culture more than mere resource availability

These objectives can be used as benchmarks for the OER quality assessment. The public good nature of OER is critical in developing quality frameworks. Here the focus is on why of quality.

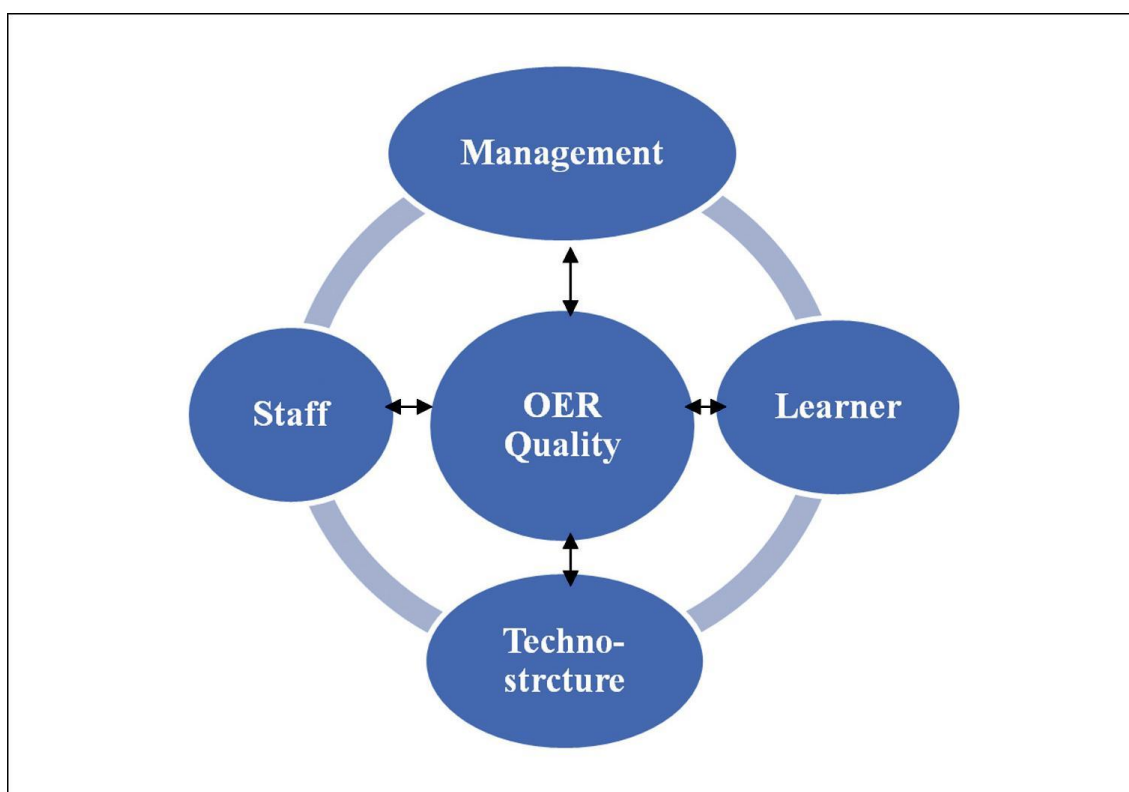
## Quality as Fit for Purpose

Here the focus is on quality of processes and expected outcomes. Serious concerns were expressed about the quality of OER materials and their pedagogical adequacy. The OER quality guidelines should take note of variations in the use of OER and differences in the perspectives those who develop and use them to teach; those who use them to learn and those who make them available. There is a strong feeling that there are only a few specific quality OER assurance process are in place. In recent years many agencies are engaged in the development of OER quality guidelines. The COL and CEMCA are actively engaged in the process of development of guidelines. The CEMCA sponsored “Quality Assurance Guidelines for Open Education Resources: TIPS Framework”, developed by Paul Kawachi provides review of quality frameworks and suggests a framework covering pedagogical quality (teaching), content materials quality (information), product and formats quality (presentation), and technical and technology quality (systems). The open learning architecture makes the development of OER quality guidelines a complex process and something different from industrialised architecture. The OER quality guidelines should address the need for synergization of perspectives of multiple

OER stakeholders. The ethical framework of guidelines is to be based on social ethics of OER. The individualised rights perspective of ethics is to be balanced with social responsibility of academic world. Here the focus is on how of quality.

## Internal Institutional Frameworks

Internal Institutional frameworks are critical to the operationalization of quality practices. OER literature indicates many gaps in the institutional policies and practices. Gajaraj Dhanarajan and David Porter edited volume of COL “Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective” provide an overview of OER Policies and Practices in Asia. In to-days world, the universities are increasingly becoming amoeba type creation moving in all directions and in all time frames at once. This needs very fluid institutional frameworks for aligning the roles of all important players, particularly management, staff and students. Quality is mainly a function of alignment of roles of management, staff and students with the assistance of techno-structure, as represented below.



Quality as Alignment of Roles

The quality practices should be able to align the facilitating and monitoring roles of management, academic role of staff and learning functions of learners.

In this context the OPAL “The Open Educational Practice Matrix” is useful to position the individual organisation quality frameworks according to the uptake of OER and maturity of institutions.

Here the challenge is contextualising the open educational practices. The internal quality assurance systems may have to follow logical frameworks of structuring main elements in OER project highlighting logical linkages between activities and expected results. The internal quality systems must put in place the process of self-evaluation of practice of using and developing OER. The capacity building of learner is critical to the quality of OER. The internal institutional structures main focus should be on this capacity building of learner i.e., ability of the learner to make sense of what is relevant and what is not relevant for his/her learning.

### External OER Quality Assessment

External assessment of quality is considered one of the objective and effective ways of continuous improvement of quality. This mechanism may be considered a way of establishing credibility and accountability of open educational practices. Designing appropriate quality procedures by external agencies for OER quality is a daunting task. The formal hierarchical procedures of peer reviews and external assessment may not be appropriate for external assessment of OER. The external agencies may focus on strengthens and appropriateness of internal performance assessment system. The extent of incorporation of user and developers evaluation tools into OER materials is equally important. The triggering effect of external quality assessment is more significant than the regulatory function. The OER use is more a self-directed activity and quality agencies role is to make self-direction a meaningful activity.

### Questions for Discussion

- How to design self-assessment of quality of OER materials?
- How to develop internal institutional frameworks for assessing, promoting and sustaining OER quality?
- How to build knowledge architecture integrating individual rights approach and social responsibility approach of academic world?
- How to assess the institutional maturity level to participate in OER projects? How suitable is the OPAL Matrix for Asian contexts?
- How to contextualise OER quality guidelines without losing sense of purpose?
- How to embody quality guidelines in OER material as a self-regulatory process?
- What is an appropriate design for external assessment of quality of OER?
- Can a crowd-source external assessment be acceptable in the academic world?
- How technology use and appropriate use of meta-data can assist in retrieving quality OER?

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