

The role of Academic Libraries in Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiatives

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Abstract

States that how the academic libraries are preparing themselves for the new type of resources emerged as “OER”, and getting recognition among the academic community; and the area where library professionals can offer advice and collaborate with the institutions, academic staff, and students as they engage with OERs.

Key words : Academic library, Open Education Resource, OER

Introduction

The growing demand for higher education and the ongoing rollout of ICT infrastructure and scholarly resources required to support teaching and research have created big challenges for higher education institutions all over the world. It has been estimated that current global enrolments higher education of 165 million will grow by a further 98 million by 2025. (<http://www.col.org>). However, this growth is unlikely to be accompanied by equivalent increases in the human and financial resources available to the higher education sector. To cater the academic needs of this huge student's population; particularly in developing countries such as India, China, ,Brazil; where the students have become habitual of using subscribed e- resources and demanding for new educational resources but budget has not been increased, is a big challenge for educational institutions and libraries to support this increased enrolments.

Research and educational institutions worldwide are incorporating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into their management, administration and educational programs in order to serve their students more cost-effectively and to prepare them for the world into which they will graduate, post graduate or Doctorate. In many developing countries, however, access to hardware, software and connectivity is remaining challenges. It is therefore critical to adapt pedagogical approaches and learning materials to this environment while ensuring high quality and relevant educational opportunities to all.

The open access movement is not the only potential solution to the serious problems that educational institutions and libraries face in the conventional scholarly communication system, but it is a very important one. Open access has struck a sympathetic cord in the library community, which has long suffered the debilitating effects of the serials crisis and budget cuts by the governments; however, libraries have been somewhat cautious in their embrace of open access, uncertain about its destabilizing effects on the scholarly publishing system and its ultimate impact on their budget and operations. However, massive open online course materials are being widely explored as alternatives and supplements to traditional university course textbooks, especially in STEM discipline.

What is Open Educational Resources (OERs)

The term “ Open Educational Resources “was coined by UNESCO at its 2002 Forum on Open Courseware (UNESCO, 2002), and emphasized at their published Paris OER Declaration (UNESCO,

2012). Open Educational Resources (OER) are *“teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work”* (UNESCO, 2012).

In reference to “OER” the term "open" generally means that the resource can be accessed and used by everyone in a non-discriminatory manner, and also that it can be adapted, modified, and shared. More specifically, the characteristic of openness addresses the removal of technical, economic, and legal barriers to gain access to and make use of open educational resources. OER include a varied range of digital documents from full course materials, modules, collections, students guide, teaching notes, text books, research articles, videos, images, music, interactive materials such as simulations and role plays, mobile apps, software, databases and any other educationally useful materials. But it should be always in mind that the term 'OER' is not synonymous with online learning, eLearning or mobile learning. Many OERs while shareable in a digital format are also printable.

The Journey of OER

The movement or concept of OER is a part of previous movements towards participatory learning, innovation processes and open access to scholarly knowledge such as the Open Access (OA) movement; the Open Source Software (OSS) movement; or the Open Content movement. After that, a connection first established by the neologism coined by David Wiley in 1998 to be applied to any creative work *“that is licensed in a manner that provides users with the right to make more kinds of uses than those normally permitted under the law - at no cost to the user”* and introduced the concept by analogy with open source.

It was the “Creative Commons Licenses” which could make “openness” possible, and it has a particular interest in and engagement with educational materials. Open Course Ware from MIT is the best example using it. The two, MIT OCW launched in 2001 and the subsequent international OCW Consortium created in 2005 was key initiator of the OER. Both and many others dealing with instructional videos, open textbooks and a broad range of materials at repositories and digital libraries rely on CC Licensing. Even Creative Commons is partnering with academic publishers of educational content. The Cape Town Open Education Declaration released in 2008 which emphasize and urging governments and publishers to make publicly funded educational materials available at no charge via the internet was also a move to strengthen the OER movement. (Cape Town Declaration, 2007)

Internationally, high hopes have been voiced for OERs to alleviate the digital divide between the global North and the global south and to make a contribution to the development of less advanced economies. Many countries around the world have make or making available multilingual OER. European countries, USA, South Korea and some developing and underdeveloped countries like India and Bangladesh have also make available class 1 to 12 textbooks in digital form under OER. Recently launched NDL project by the Indian Government may be considered as a big step in the OER movement.

Role of Academic Libraries in OER

Academic libraries are committed to improving dissemination to scholarly and educational content for their users and, with that aim in mind; they regularly create and organize collections of learning and teaching materials. But in the preparation, collection, management and dissemination of OERs, the libraries are not been widely recognized yet at the same level as their role in Open Access to

science and data. In development and management of OER, academic libraries may play a big role. However, it is debatable whether this role would be as creator of OER or helper in creating OER and make accessible to the end users as other library resources.

Generally Academic libraries in beginning keep a distance with the OERs thinking that these are not directly related to them. That's why most of academic libraries generally not linked these resources with the library resources (Hirst, 2009) and not worried about digital educational resources (Davies, 2009). However, Kleymeer, Kleinman, and Hanss (2010) consider libraries to be among the first OER producers, as they have been digitising and sharing digital materials even before the generalization of public Internet. Libraries have a central position in the lives of the academic community members even despite the changes brought by technology and availability of scholarly knowledge online. In this sense, librarians have relevant skills, including outreach and education, curriculum development, and instructional support, which could benefit OER programs. As Robertson (2010b) suggests libraries can best offer advice and engage in meaningful relationships with Open Education in relation to: metadata and resource description; information management and resource dissemination; information literacy (finding and evaluating OERs) ; subject guides; and managing and clearing Intellectual Property Rights.

How Can Academic Libraries Support OERs?

After the use of Internet as a vehicle of scholarly communication, academic libraries around the world are playing an increasingly active role in the teaching-learning process. That is why academic libraries sometimes being redefined as Learning Resource Centers (LRCs). Among other functions, LRCs are intended to develop educational digital resource collections, gathering both institutional and externally created resources. In this context, OER take up an important and prominent position.

Academics around the world in the releasing OERs have thus far had success making their learning materials available informally on personal websites, or through tools like Slide Share or YouTube. But the process is more complex for an institution especially if it is considering how it might maximize the return on its investment in terms of openness such as publicity, goodwill, efficiency, or an improved student experience. Furthermore learning materials, where they are available, may be poorly integrated into the user's view of library resources (Tony Hirst, 2009). Also, as pointed out by the Downes (2002), whichever way an institution chooses to approach sharing resources, the general failure of a Learning Object economy points to the need to develop less complex, more scalable and sustainable approaches to sharing OERs . Here academic libraries can fill in parts of this picture and called to play a key role.

As the institutions and governments are coming forward to boost up the OER movement, the number of OERs and their potential users are increasing. Many institutions worldwide have created digital repositories for the management of teaching and learning resources produced by their academic community, or included these resources as specific collections in their institutional repositories (Bueno-de-la-Fuente and Hernández-Pérez, 2011). Now most of the academic libraries are realizing the statements of Belliston (2009) which states:

“Librarians can help by contributing their own OERs to the commons; screening for, indexing, and archiving quality OERs; using OERs in their own teaching; and participating in discussions leading toward responsible intellectual property policies and useful standards.”

Librarians had a predisposition toward assuming that their role would be managing OER repositories, developing generic OER, indexing, cataloguing, and promotion the use of OER. They

have still, however, some concerns about third party copyright clearance, currency and quality of OERs, funding, etc. (Nikoi, 2010). However, (de Beer, 2012), highlights the low demand for librarians to locate OER, and confirms the predominance of intellectual property concerns. Apart from supporting payment or reimbursement for open access publishing fees, academic libraries are beginning to provide financial support for and promotion of open educational resources (OERs). Oregon State University Libraries and Press Open Textbook Initiative is the best example of this new role (<http://oregonstate.edu> & <http://www.geneseo.edu>).

After reviewing what has been discussed above so far, libraries can offer advice and collaborate with the institutions, academic staff, and students as they engage with OERs in the following areas:

- Preserving of created OERs
 - Lend expertise in search and discovery
 - Metadata and resource description
 - Information management and resource dissemination
 - Digital or Information literacy (finding and evaluating OERs)
 - Subject-based guides to finding resources
 - Managing Intellectual Property Rights and promoting appropriate open licensing
 - Financial support for the promotion of OERs
 - Integrating OERs with library resources

Conclusion

In this rapidly changing landscape where the technology is changing at very low interval and changing the information seeking behavior of students and researchers, researchers will continue to require support and guidance from library and information science professionals in navigating the requirements of open access and the development, management and promotion of OERs (Boon, Stuart, 2012). In addition, library and information science professionals will need to stay informed and lead the way in collaborating with their institutions, publishers, organizations, and other academic libraries to develop new funding mechanisms and incentives to support faculty involvement in open access publishing. The time has come to encourage decision makers in governments and institutions to invest in the systematic production, adaptation and use of OER and to bring them into the mainstream of higher education in order to improve the quality of curricula and teaching and to reduce costs.

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