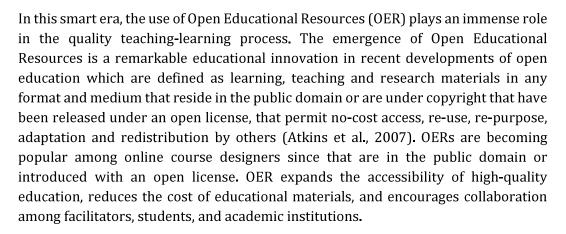# Open Educational Resources for Higher Education

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In this smart era, the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) plays an immense role in the quality teaching-learning process. The emergence of Open Educational Resources is a remarkable educational innovation in recent developments of open education which are defined as learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others (Atkins et al., 2007). OERs are becoming popular among online course designers since that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. OER expands the accessibility of high-quality education, reduces the cost of educational materials, and encourages collaboration among facilitators, students, and academic institutions.

The MIT's Open Courseware (OCW) project is considered as the first example of OER. Hereafter, OCW has grown vivaciously among developed and developing countries. The Recommendation on OER, adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its 40th session on 25 November 2019, is the first international normative instrument to embrace the field of openly licensed educational materials and technologies in education (UNESCO, n.d.) Nowadays, Educational institutions and world's most prestigious universities are working to create and disseminate OER to support scholars and students. The OER movement has empowered researchers and educators to become more innovative in their teaching and learning, through the openness and flexibility. There are several reasons behind this open educational movement such as outdated teaching materials, cost, access and equality.

Open educational Movement in Sri Lanka

In 2017 on par with the introduction of sustainability bill in line with United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, adoption of OER for teaching and learning is

promoted as sustainable education practice. Open University of Sri Lanka had been pioneering in introducing OER concept to the country, where several studies have been conducted to promote OER adoption by practitioners (Karunanayaka & Naidu, 2018). In Programme Review manual released by University Grants Commission as well indicates the importance of usage of Open Educational Resources under the criterion- 8 named "Innovative and Healthy Practices". The standard denotes that the Faculty /Institute should encourage the staff and students to use OER to supplement teaching and learning. As a source of evident faculties should have Faculty Board approved policies and guidelines on the use OER by teachers and students (University Grants Commission, 2015).

Some research findings regarding OER in Sri Lankan Context

Senanayake and Sandanayake (2021) conducted study on the readiness of teachers in adopting flipped classrooms and open educational resources in undergraduate blended learning . The researchers concluded that some of the lecturers are already using OER during blended learning. Sandanayake (2019) specified the importance of incorporating OER in undergraduate online learning. The results stated that undergraduates faced challenges in finding relevant, free and open materials even though the OER materials were helpful for them. In addition, the designers of OER-based blended course should create the social interactions such as peer facilitated discussion forums, video based learning materials to deliver course content and group based assessment activities which would be helpful for learners to improve the self-learning abilities. Further, they pointed out there should be the sustainability of OER-based online courses in undergraduate degrees.

A research was aimed at evaluating the OER and Social Media use for education among the medical students at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka by Hettige et al in (2022). Their findings stated that the majority of the students used OER and SM for education; however, only a minority accessed reliable information. Students accepted information available in wiki sites and general non-specific web searchers without considering the credibility of sources. The majority of the students did not refer to e-journals. As such another study reported that the undergraduate students' awareness and use of open educational resources (OER) at University of Vocational Technology with reference to the two degree programs studied are at a bare minimum. Therefore, University should implement special initiatives to introduce OER to their students in order to broaden the influence of OER and effectively advance quality education. Furthermore, the findings of this study would be helpful to the university authorities to make aware about potential barriers related to using OER and help them develop strategies to overcome these barriers in the context of the institutional environment (Thenabadu & Seneviratne, 2021).

Advantage and disadvantage of using Open Educational Resources

<u>Advantage</u>

- Save time and energy by adopting or revising resources that have already been created.
- Users can access OERs at any time, and they can access the material repeatedly.
- OERs can be distributed widely with no cost.
- Quick access and dissemination.
- OERs provide the path for lifelong learning.
- OERs can be improved quickly through direct editing by users and incorporation of user feedback.
- Authentic and authoritative resources.

<u>Disadvantage</u>

- Users have inadequate knowledge on what OERs are and their usability.
- Faculty staff have not encouraged students to use OER for learning
- There may be some quality issues.
- Language barriers.
- Technical issues.
- Sustainability issues.
- There are only a few subjects and disciplines covered, and not sufficient learning material available related to all subject.

Conclusions

Once adopted, OERs provide the permissions necessary for academic institutions to engage in several pedagogical innovations. It is recommended that university/ faculty should promote the OER initiative to raise student awareness. However, before using OERs, users can go through a quick evaluation process to determine whether it's useful or not. Users must check for their quality, appropriateness and technical aspects. Many students had inadequate knowledge on how to use OER in their subject discipline. Therefore, Faculties and Academic libraries should use their web pages to host and promote OERs for easy access and use by their students/ patrons. Further, there is a need for Librarians to create awareness among students and staff on the importance of OER in academic and research endeavors.

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The trade union movement represents the organized economic power of the workers... It is in reality the most potent and the most direct social insurance the workers can establish.

(Samuel Gompers)