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DECADES OF ADVOCACY: TOWARDS EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) IN UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA: THE MISSING LINK

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Abstract:

This paper is a position article that explores the various ways that have been missing in the decades of advocacy for the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in universities in Nigeria. The paper examines both the global and Nigerian perspectives in the advocacy for the use of OER. It also explains exhaustively the concept of OER. The paper identifies institutional support, awareness of the existence of OER in the university communities, adequate bandwidth with sustained ICT capacities and facilities, sound policy framework and public-private partnership initiatives as measures that are missing in the chains of advocacy to popularize use of OER in teaching and learning in Nigerian universities. The paper firmly believes that when these issues identified are properly addressed and interlinked, the awareness of existence and popularity of OER in teaching and learning in universities will be boosted which will ultimately lead to their incorporation in the nation's university curriculum content and processes.

Introduction

Utilization of open educational resources (OER) has become a global trend and the advent of new technology has made the world to become a global village in information dissemination. This age of technology has witnessed tremendous opportunities in accessing learning materials online globally, thus bringing information to the door steps of the people. Educational sector is taking the advantage of technology to assess online learning resources of which Nigeria is not left out.

The idea of Open Educational Resources (OER) was first introduced at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting in July 2002 to address the effects of Open Courseware on higher education in developing countries. Before the UNESCO conference, the OER campaign has gained significant attention in 2001, when Charles Vest, the then President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) made public the institutes plan to bring all of its course materials online for everyone's profit (Commonwealth of Learning, 2017). The Paris OER declaration was adopted at the World Open Educational Resources (OER) congress held in June 2012 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France to drive the global concept of OER. This declaration was the first step in establishing OER- supporting policies worldwide. (UNESCO, 2017).

Open Educational Resources (OER) may be defined as online learning tools accessible to Students, self-learners and educators. It could also be explained as free access to learning materials without any obstacles at no cost and with the possibility of comparing and contrasting educational programmes and course content (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2007). According to UNESCO (2002), Atkins, Brown and Hammond (2007), OER is one of the ways to improve the teaching and learning resources available in higher education institutions and to provide access to education in a truly scalable way.

In all, OER is meant to offer free access to all kinds of educational resources to all those who desire it without financial or geographical limitations. It is a new paradigm that would make learning and teaching much more existing and limitless and at the same time enrich the quality of education generally whether at national or international level.

Open Educational Resources: A Conceptual Explanation.

Open Educational Resources (OER) as defined by Johnstone (2005) is the open provision of educational resources, made possible by information and communication technologies, for non-commercial consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users. At a conference hosted by UNESCO in 2002, OER was first used as a concept. OER refers to educational resources and other materials designed for use in teaching and learning that are openly available for use by both educators and students without having to pay the accompanying fee or royalties for the license.

Its principal attribute is the ability to make free use of educational resources. UNESCO (2017) defined OER as any kind of educational material that is in the public domain or introduced under an open license. The nature of these open materials means they can be legally and freely copied, used, adapted and re-shared by anyone. OECD (2007) sees Open Educational Resources as digitized materials that are freely and openly available for use and re-use by educators, students and self-learners for teaching, learning and research. The underline issue from these opinions is that OER is freely accessed and used.

McAndrew (2006), Geser, ; Salzburg Research and EduMedia Group (2007) and Córcoles, Hornung-Prähauser, Kalz, Minguillón, Ferran, Naust-Schulz and Schaffert (2007) posit that the term Open Educational Resources is used synonymously with "Open courseware", Open e-learning content", "Open digital educational content", Open education content" to even "Open content". OERs are created through systems which enable authors to grant specific permission to use their work. The idea behind OER is to apply open licenses to enable wider dissemination of educational resources, such as CC licenses. These special licenses allow for the dissemination and use of educational and learning materials otherwise protected by copyright (Creativecommons.org). In its simplest form, According to Butcher (2011), all educational resources (including curriculum maps, textbooks, course materials, streaming videos, podcasting, multimedia applications and any other materials intended for use in teaching and learning) are openly available for use by educators and students, without the need to pay royalties or license fees.

According to the Hewlett Foundation, OER is resources for teaching, learning and research that resides in the public domain or is released under an intellectual property license that allows others to use it freely and re-use it. In 2012, the Paris OER Declaration adapted the original UNESCO version and defined OER as "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, residing in the public domain or released under an open license

that allows other persons with no or limited restrictions to access, use, adapt and redistribute at no cost.

OER includes complete courses, modules, course materials, textbooks, video streaming, tests, software, and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge." McGreal (2017) defines OER repositories as digital databases which accommodates learning content or materials, applications and resources such as documents, audio recordings, texts, videos, social networking tools and multimedia applications. Via these servers, OER is made available on the World Wide Web for learners and teachers.

To Downes (2009), OER represents those resources which do not attract fees, licenses, tuitions, commitments, registrations, etc. to the clients or recipients of the said resources even as Smith & Casserly (2006) considered OER to be ideological. According to the duo, the OER movement's ideology and at its heart is the simple and powerful idea that the knowledge of the world is a public good and that technology in general, and the World Wide Web in particular, provides an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use and reuse that knowledge. Wiley (1998), reflects that the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement originated from Open and Distance learning (ODL) development, and from a broader context a culture of open knowledge, free sharing and peer collaboration that emerged in the late 20th century.

Over time, the Open Educational Resources have come to include not only material, but also learning and knowledge management applications and content creation tools, and digital resource publishing standards and licensing mechanisms that enable users to adapt resources to their cultural, educational pedagogical requirements. Though the phenomenon of Open Educational Resources (OER) is very recent, it is a subject of increasing interest. There are no clear figures available but it has grown in terms of numbers of initiatives, number of people involved and amount of available resources. It is a global development, though most resources are generated in developed countries at present. Despite the lack of reliable figures, it can also be said that OER fosters international interinstitutional cooperation as well as peer-to- peer cooperation.

Indeed, OER enhances educational quality, accelerates knowledge flow and increases the number of people involved in educational processes such as informal and lifelong learning. They can be used worldwide independently of the education system and the structure of national curricula (Grodecka & S'liwowski, 2014; Kurelovic, 2016). Caswell, Henson, Jenson & Wiley (2008) claimed that moving towards OER use could significantly reduce the learning costs. Thus, OER has the potential to broaden access to education and provide equity. This is particularly important within the commonwealth for developing countries like Nigeria and others.

Advocacy for the use of Open Educational Resources (OER): Global perspective

Globally, the application of technology to education and the use of e-learning platforms are becoming ever more prevalent in tertiary education. However, for commercial purposes the majority of e-learning platforms and learning management systems available to educators and students are. Many others are under proprietary systems while many others are still under copyright. There are many implications of these restrictions, including: using commercial materials you have to pay for or subscribe to them; using proprietary materials you need to obtain passwords to unlock them; and using copyrighted materials you need to get express permission from the authors. The implication is that although the materials are available on the web, they are not free; therefor they cannot be accessed or even used by all. As a result, many who desired these materials became impaired due to financial and other limiting obligations. Thus, the world began to look for ways to access education materials that are free from financial and other obligations. Therefore the advocacy for open educational resources (OER) becomes imperative.

At the global level, UNESCO has released several documents and guidelines and is currently considering draft recommendations. Again in the US OER policy manual, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) recommendation involves the creation of an OER grant system or a provision to mark the use of OER in course schedules, among others (IFLA, n.d). It notes that one of the most successful ways to promote the adoption and development of OERs on campus is to create an OER grant program at the state level. OER grant programs provide financial opportunities to encourage the use of OER's by faculty and help raise awareness of the advantage and availability of OER.

With support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) launched a two year initiative in 2004 aimed at raising awareness of the OER concept and supporting capacity-building and informed decision- making by existing and potential providers and users (D'Antoni, n.d). This initiative had three particular objectives: promoting international dialog and knowledge exchange; connecting people who may not otherwise meet, either in person or electronically, particularly those who constitute UNESCO's key constituency- developing countries- to come together and engage in a debate; creating an international community of practice of OER. This IIEP initiative has conducted several international discussion forums online, and the result of these forums is much of the knowledge we have today about the OER movement in developing worlds. In 2010 UNESCO launched the initiative entitled "Taking OER Beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity" in cooperation with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). This initiative aims to increase the level of OER by educational decision- makers and quality assurance experts in Asia, Africa and the Pacific and to broaden its understanding (Moe-Pryce, 2011).

According to Kanwar (2015), COL works on four areas; (1) advocacy and awareness generation regarding the benefits and availability of OER; (2) policy development on OER at the national

and institutional levels; (3) capacity building so that more governments, institutions and individuals are able to effectively harness the potential of OER and (4) promote research through its publications on OER and its Chairs programme. Col's latest policy advocacy activities include a recent event in South African in which 11 countries from the Southern African Development Group (SADC) participated. The aim was to foster an adequate understanding of OER's policy development rationale and processes for promoting access and quality. This has helped Antigua and Barbuda's government embed OER into education policy in their ICT. The Ministry will adopt a default CC license for all material that is publicly funded. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that international community, particularly developed countries have been active in initiating moves, actions and policies towards OER. But what is the advocacy level in Nigeria, the sub-heading below explains.

Efforts in the use of Open Educational Resources (OER): The Nigerian Situation.

In Nigeria, there have been strong efforts and advocacy for use of OER. For instance, in order to raise awareness and validate the draft on OER policy, the National Universities Commission (NUC) organized two consultative meetings on 21 August and 12 September respectively, and with the approval of the Ministry of Education, the NUC formed a National Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the policy. The first Steering Committee meeting, held on 21 August 2017, was intended to share OER draft policy report with members of the National Steering Committee (NSC) on OER Nigeria and this led to the creation of the National OER Repository known as the Nigerian University System Open Educational Resources (NUSOER) (Commonwealth of Learning, 2017). The Repository is maintained by the National Universities Commission to among others, serve as a gateway to Open Resources held by 153 universities. According to the current Executive secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), Professor Abubakar Rasheed, "the Nigerian National Policy on Open Educational Resources for Higher Education is the governments' initiative to ensure a coordinated and deliberate approach to the creation and enhancement of quality teaching and learning materials, curricula, course design, programmes, as well as the preparation of successful interactions with students. With the development of the policy, the government hopes to address issues of access to quality higher education and student enrolment beyond the capacity of existing higher educational institutions in Nigeria.

Again, as part of Nigeria's efforts to increase access to affordable learning opportunities, through the INVEST Africa Programme, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2017) organized a six-day workshop on OER course development at the Yaba College of Technology (YCT) in Lagos in May, 2016. The workshop was designed to build capacity at YCT in developing short, non-formal courses using OER content where appropriate by producing learning resources as OER in a range of different media formats. However, some institutions have been promoting the use of OER; For instance, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which was reopened after been suspended in 1984 by the Federal Government as an ODL institution, strives to provide education for all and promote lifelong learning. NOUN's OER activities started in 2014 with the

establishment of an OER unit under the Vice-Chancellors office. NOUN in collaboration with UNESCO and COL had engaged in capacity building in this area.

Despite all these advocacy by the NUC, and other institutions and agencies, Ipaye (2012) noted that out of the 30 participants drawn from 10 universities in a three -day workshop hosted by RETRIDAL at the National Open University of Nigeria in November 2012 with support from COL, including the National Open University of Nigeria, a Questionnaire on OER were responded to. Their responses, which formed another paper's focus, indicated that less than 10% of the respondents had ever heard of OER. All participants stated that their universities had no official references to OER, no OER policy and no funding was provided for the development of OER. This revelation about the current status of OER in Nigerian universities may be shocking, although it could be said that 10 out of 128 may be too small a sample size.

There is therefore an urgent need for more collaboration and institutional support for OER in Nigeria, including the attraction of the private sector so that OER could be popularizes and made use of in Nigeria. This is where collaborative initiatives could be of great assets to achieving this, but how this can be achieved is to be found in the next sub- heading.

Towards effective utilization of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Universities in Nigeria: The Missing Link.

Open Educational Resources (OER) have become vital assets for enhancing both teaching and learning, including research in universities globally. In Nigeria, despite decades of advocacy on the use of OER, the efforts have not yielded the desired results. This is as a result of missing links arising from institutional, human capital, government, private sector involvement and even infrastructural disequilibrium.

For OER to be accessed and utilized in universities, there must be a link between its existence and awareness by both the university authorities and the students. Awareness is a great factor that influences the utilization of online information resources, including OER. There seems to be poor institutional and students' awareness on the existence and usefulness of OER which seems to impede its popularity and appreciation by the universities and students (Ipaye, 2012). Research works by Torres (2013) and Huang, Jessica, Yan and Hu (2015) indicate that acceptance and use of OER requires development of awareness and reaching an understanding of all OER dimensions, increase of recognizability of the OER repositories and development of online collaborative communities. It includes the appreciation of the changes OER could bring in teaching and learning. Awareness of OER in Nigerian universities is generally poor, despite token activities of some institutions to enhance its inclusion in their programmes (Omaniyi, 2006). It is when there is adequate awareness of the existence of OER, that their use can be effected by the people.

Institutional support especially by libraries is another missing link in the efforts to enhance effective utilization of OER in Nigerian universities. University libraries are usually key in

acquisition, enlightenment and availability of OER resources. University libraries also play vital roles in the advocacy and popularization of OER among the students and other library users. A situation where many university libraries remain reticent and unwilling to key into the global family of users of OER for research remains a sore part of the advocacy and use of OER in universities (Onyeneke, 2019). May (2014) argues that readiness of supporting institutions to accept and collaborate on open repository is necessary for use of OER in their universities. University libraries in Nigeria must develop both human capital and infrastructure and the willingness to join the global trend in the use of OER which is currently poor among the universities in Nigeria (Aken, Nsirim and Nsirim, 2019).

For both access and use, computers, quality bandwidth reinforced by tools and implementation resources are critical for the operation of OER repositories. This is because these resources where available, allow open content to be accessed and used seamlessly. For example, teachers and students have to be able to search for potential useful resources and these resources need to be in formats that are adaptable and reusable. Speirs (2006) remarks, for example, that the creative commons license makes resources legally available for adaptation and reuse. Unless universities in Nigeria through their university libraries develop and acquire quality bandwidth, complimented by adequate tools to access OER resources, effective use of OER in teaching and learning remains a mirage. Uhegbu (2008) is worried that one of the constraints of universities in Nigeria to be globally interlinked has remained poor bandwidth which limits their access and use of global online information resources, including OER.

Another missing link in the use of OER in universities in Nigeria is policy framework. Policy is a plan of action, statement of aims and ideas especially one made by a government or its agency. It is an official prescription or enactments that dictate government approach to any issue, in this case OER (Mariam Websters Collegiate Dictionary, 2002). According to Okereke (2003), policy is a form of law made by governing bodies (universities) to govern, direct, control and regulate members of the organization (in this case lecturers and students). Policy therefore is a course of action, a regulatory instrument that constantly tries to evaluate government actions against certain prescribed indices (for example use of OER). Policy framework is necessary for use of OER. Without policy framework, use of OER may be abused. Policy framework would prescribe the kind of resources to use, how to use it and collaborative obligations thereto. Uhegbu (2008) and Nkiko and Yusuf (2008) reveal that poor policy framework has remained one of the issues for globalized library services in Nigeria and availability of online education resources and support. It is generally believed that good policy framework eliminates duplicity in resources acquisition and unwanted educational resources and reduces cost of services. When there is good policy framework, it will prescribe the type of educational resources (OER) to be accessed and used, frequency of use, category of users and timeframe. This is one of the areas Nigerian universities are currently lacking which may impede access and use of OER.

Support from the private sector is also necessary for access and use of OER. Since the use of OER requires provision of adequate ICT resources which are currently lacking in most

universities in Nigeria (Yusuf, 2019), cooperation of the private sector is critical. The private sector such as rich and wealthy Nigerians, corporate bodies such as banks, industries etc. could support the universities by donating funds with which they could expand their ICT infrastructure or provide one where there is none. They can also help by buying and donating ICT facilities to the universities. The activities of TetFund in this regard is deeply appreciated but substantially inadequate. With private sector support, the issues of poor bandwidth, poor ICT/network reception, and erratic power supply could be a thing of the past which will ultimately facilitate access and use of OER in Universities in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Open Educational Resources have been recognized globally as vital for teaching and learning. They enrich both the content and processes of teaching and learning. This is why many countries including Nigeria have cued into the global campaign for their incorporation into the global information systems and networks. However, the poor advocacy and popularity in Nigeria often make it inaccessible for use. It is therefore the opinion of this paper that with focused advocacy coupled with sustained resources like institutional support, adequate bandwidth, sound policy framework and public-private partnership initiative sustained by awareness and popularity among the students and lectures, use of OER in universities in Nigeria will be further sustained and enhanced.

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