African Virtual University
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Is integration of OERs in distance higher education the panacea to quality higher education in Africa? Perceptions of higher education leaders and managers

Issue at-hand

Distance education is confronted by many challenges among which are issues of expanding access, reducing cost and improving quality of teaching and learning at a time when growth in higher education is generally increasing. In order to tackle these challenges, open educational resources (OERs) have been identified as the strategy to adopt for cheaper, easier material production and faster dissemination of knowledge. OERs are essentially teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others. They may include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, tools, materials, or techniques that are used for supporting access to knowledge.

OERs are grounded in the understanding of education as a common good with the ethos of open and distance learning (ODL) and are guided by non-commercial and non-monopolistic principles. In distance education, OERs constitute a strategy in which educational resources can be shared and disseminated across institutions. Examples of OERs are African Virtual University (AVU) OERs and materials used for the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) program that were developed by a consortium of experts in teacher education to assist in the provision of quality teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, in order promote the use of OERs and to ensure that sharing of learning materials across borders is enhanced for better quality teaching and learning, it is important to investigate the perceptions of the leaders and managers of higher education institutions in Africa on the integration of OERs in distance

education. Ado Tenebe and Rotimi Ogidan sought to do this in a study whose findings were presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the African Virtual University.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study by Tenebe and Ogidan on the integration of OERs in distance higher education in Africa based on the perceptions of leaders and managers of higher education institutions in the continent:

- Organize fora, meetings and seminars to sensitize the leadership and management of higher education institutions in Africa about OERs with a view to increasing awareness, their understanding and readiness to integrate OERs in teaching and learning activities;
- Integrate OERs in capacity building efforts of institutions of higher education in Africa to enhance staff preparedness to accept the integration of OERs in distance education and also help equip prospective participants with requisite knowledge, skills and competences to be able to participate fully in the knowledge cycle;
- Advocate, formulate and implement OERs supportive policies at the institutional, national and international levels that would also protect intellectual property rights e.g. policies and procedures governing intellectual property, plagiarism and patents;
- Assist learners and learner support service providers to gain and retain computer skills and competences to be able to access and use OERs.

Implications

The study reveals that leaders and managers of higher education institutions in Africa believe that integration of OERs in distance higher education will have the following implications:

- Promote culture of quality assurance since learning materials would be placed in the public domain for assessment and create an opportunity for higher education institutions to develop a shared understanding of interactive approach on how to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- Necessitate the review and revision of existing policies, visions and missions of some individual institutions of higher education to be able to accommodate the integration of OERs;
- Secure financial resources that would help procure and sustain the use of OER facilities;
- Necessitate capacity building of staff and students to understand OER policy and use;
- Expand access to higher education and training provision in a more cost-effective manner while at the same time free learners from the constraints of time and place;
- Foster collaboration among distance education institutions that will make it possible for them to share and use quality learning materials for free.

Conclusion

Although some of the leaders and managers of higher education institutions in Africa are still reluctant to adopt and put machineries in motion for the integration OERs in ODL, possibly due to lack of awareness, it is increasingly becoming more attractive and cost-effective to do so. The integration of OERs in ODL is also possible because of the proliferation of a variety of ODL formats in higher education. It would therefore be more convenient and helpful for institutions offering distance higher education in Africa to integrate OERs in their ODL programs so as to provide more cost-effective opportunities and access to online learning materials.

Reference

Paper presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the AVU, Nairobi, Kenya, under the session on *Open Educational Resources (OER) Integration.*
Title: Perception of Executive Board Members of African Council for Distance Education on Integration of Open Educational Resources in Distance Higher Education Institutions in Africa
Presenters: Vincent Ado Tenebe (National Open University of Nigeria) & Rotimi Ogidan (African Council for Distance Education)

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