

THEME 05:
EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT

Opening up Access to Education: Role of Open Educational Resources

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Access to reliable and useful learning resources and the costs of these learning resources are often observed as substantial obstacles to education and training in developing contexts. Emphasizing the need of universal access to high quality education, UNESCO identified the significance of Open Educational Resources (OER) as a strategic opportunity in this regard (UNESCO, 2015). 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 (UNESCO, 2012). Open licensing of materials opens up access to educational resources through providing users with rights to use them in different ways, at no cost. The use of OER has also been recommended as a very cost-effective way to invest in curriculum development and quality teaching-learning material development in an Asian context (Dhanarajan & Porter, 2013).

This paper presents an investigation on the perceptions of Sri Lankan school teachers on the adoption of OER in their teaching-learning situations in terms of enhancing access to *quality educational materials in a cost effective manner, as part of a project implemented by the Faculty of Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka*. A design-based research approach is used in this project that involves design and implementation of a professional development intervention program in several stages for teachers on the integration of OER in the teaching-learning process. During Stage 1 of the project, a preliminary survey was conducted among 230 teachers representing nine provinces of the country. Data was collected through questionnaires, concept maps, focus group discussions, self-reflections, and documentary analysis. Teachers' awareness on OER was found to be minimal where only 10% had even heard the term OER before, and none using OER. However, once their awareness was raised through the intervention, the teacher perceptions signified that OER increase accessibility, flexibility, equal opportunity, adaptability, and cost-effectiveness in the use of learning resources. Teachers were highly motivated about having free access to quality educational materials which they can reuse/revise/remix/redistribute without any legal issues. Several challenges were faced by them too, mainly the language issue, since the materials are mostly in English language. However, they were happy about the opportunity available for them to translate quality materials into their local languages – Sinhala and Tamil, without any restrictions. Limited Internet access and connectivity issue was another challenge where the teachers need support. Increased availability of high quality learning materials free of charge, and with flexible access to adopt, adapt and use them, is expected to result in gradually making these teachers becoming more productive professionals who can effectively cater to the learning needs of their students. Developing capacity of teachers on the adoption and creation of OER will undoubtedly strengthen the school education system in the country through popularizing the use of freely available quality learning materials in a cost-effective manner. It can also provide insights to make recommendations to formulate evidence-based guidelines to support creation and the use of OER as cost-effective learning materials in educational systems in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Open educational resources, Open access to education, Cost-effective learning materials*