Chapter 8
Open Educational Resources in Africa:
Opportunities, Pathways, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The open access movement came as a result of the rising cost of learning materials and the need for having publicly funded research or works available on the public domain. This is a movement which is in support of having educational learning resources freely available on the internet. Despite the intellectual properly issues surrounding use of learning resources, many institutions in Africa are adopting these digital learning resources. The chapter documents how the OER movement started, its advantages and disadvantages, copyright and licensing issues, models, and challenges in adopting OERs.

INTRODUCTION

The cost of learning resources has been rising rapidly in recent years. These resources include e-books, e-journals, courseware, modules, learning objects and other online learning communities or platforms. In Africa, the challenge has been profound because of low income per capita among most African learners. However, one initiative that has been gaining momentum is that of Open Educational Resources (OERs). These are freely licensed and available learning materials on the Internet. With the introduction of these OERs and their gaining in popularity and rising costs in learning materials, learners have no choice except to make use of these open education resources. The impact of use of these OERs has been tremendous in developing countries such as African nations because of the huge benefits that accumulate from use of such resources. However, their adoption has not been easy, with many learners and researchers questioning the use of these resources in academia. The purpose of this chapter is to do a literature review analysis of the open access initiatives in Africa. An outline showing the transformation taking place in the learning environment and the need for OERs, the models of OERs and challenges that African nations are facing in fully embracing OER is provided. By the end of this Chapter, one should be able to:

- Provide a definition of open education resources
- Understand the concept of open educational resources (OER)
- Describe how OERs started
- Describe the challenges and benefits of OER

WHAT ARE OERS?

Bert (2018) defined open educational resources as the freely available resources on the Internet. These are fast gaining recognition among many academic institutions. Hylén (2002) defined OERs as part of a larger trend towards openness in higher education. UNESCO (2002) also defined open educational resources as teaching, learning or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution. Similarly, the Flora Hewlett Foundation (2017) as quoted by Mishra (2017) stated that open educational resources are 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 and repurposing by others. The most common form of licensing used in OER is Creative Commons.

OERs should be freely available, have open licence and modifiable. OERs include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. OERs are playing a fundamental role in bringing equality in education as the poor are also affording access to scholarly materials. The term 'Open' entails, at a minimum or no cost to the user of the resource. There should be no barriers or a few barriers in accessing such open resources. The resources must also be under such an open license that allows editing, that is, they should also be available in an editable format.

Some of the resources that Hylen (2005) noted to be part of the OER initiatives include open courseware and content; open software tools e.g. learning management systems; open material for e-learning; repository of learning objects and free educational courses. Wiley (2007) proposed what he called 5Rs on the concept of OERs.

i)   Reuse: Users have the right to reuse content in various ways;
ii) Redistribute: Users can share copies of the original content;
iii) Review: The right to adapt, adjust and modify a resource;
iv) Remix. The right to match the original or revise content with other open content to create something new. Users are allowed to produce new resources from existing ones and
v)   Retain: Right to make, own, and control copies of the content.

From Wiley's 5Rs proposal, it can be seen that OERs should allow users freedom to access the resource, download it and share. Resources in these Open Access databases should not be copyright protected thus making users free to do their own review and editing of the original resources to create new ones. Many institutions of higher learning in Africa are promoting the use of OERs. University Libraries in Africa are promoting open access content through creating repositories and links of open access resources on their website portals. The integration of OER into national policy is an ongoing and slow process, but in Africa, there have been successes in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania. Thus from the 5Rs, it can be seen that there is huge potential benefits that can be

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