

Teachers' Perceptions of Creating, Sharing and Using Open Education Resources (OERs) in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

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Abstract: One of the emerging issues in educational discourse today is the development of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and its potential in expanding access and improving the quality of education, particularly in developing countries such as Malaysia. There are an increasing number of OER materials which are created and made available by multi-lateral agencies, consortia and individual organizations but it is under-utilized. The increasing potential of OER is said to bring change perspectives from learners as well as the teachers who struggle to find new approaches to make the learning and teaching more meaningful. This paper will explore the perceptions of English language teachers in a developing country such as Malaysia on the creation, sharing and usage of OERs to increase their students' participation in higher education, especially in a lifelong learning context. Data was collected based on a survey conducted among English language teachers who are currently employed in a local public university. The findings of this study is hoped to change the mindsets of traditional English language teachers as to the inclusion or acceptance of OER in their teaching process, in line with Malaysia's vision to become a centre for knowledge in the Asian region.

Key words: Creating, open educational resources, perceptions, sharing, using, USM.

1. Introduction

Open educational resources (OER) seem to be a buzz word and part of a larger trend in today's digital era of globalization. This is especially prevalent in the higher education sector with OERs said to bring a change of perspective in making teaching and learning a more meaningful and productive process [1]. The popular notion of OERs include free and open access to digitized materials that are accessible to academics, students and self-learners to use and re-use for teaching, learning and research purposes. However, OER seem to be a relatively new phenomenon in terms of the vast opportunities it has to offer across a range of disciplines and many academics are unaware as to the accessibility factor of these reputable online resources that entail open access, open learning, open scholarship, open source or open textbook and open badges.

Hylen [2] explicitly propagates the wide range of OER in terms of its diversity and these encompass various teaching and learning materials, modules, courses, online textbooks, videos, tests, open software tools like learning management systems and open materials for e-learning of a particular institution. He

further reiterates that there exists a few arguments pertaining to the phenomenon of openness which relate to “free availability of internet, unlimited restrictions on the use of the various resources, no price barriers (subscriptions, licensing fee, pay per view fees) and few legal permission barriers (copyright and licensing restrictions)”.

The current limelight on the advent of OER has transformed its evolution and has qualified its importance in terms of making it a part of the global educational agenda in relation to its factor of sharing, using, upgrading and redistribution of knowledge. This perspective of giving importance to OER gives prominence to the notion of literacy put forth by Kress [3] which highlights on the multimodality of literacy. Multimodality reinforces the concept of new media in relation to OER where the focal point is integrating various modes in the process of creating, sharing and using of the various digital resources. Several initiatives and interests by several government sectors have been carried out to facilitate the search for OER in a constructive manner especially to fulfill the needs of learning, teaching and research requirements. The potential of OER are growingly significant in relation to increasing access, reducing costs and enhancing educational quality in the higher education sector [4].

2. Review of Literature

Technology has the potential to change the manner of pedagogy and learning traits as well as to open access to millions. OER has the potential reduce the cost of that access [5]. The concepts and practices of OER have a far reaching effect on the various trends of teaching and learning in the higher education context. OER generally refers to educational materials that encompass research articles, textbooks, podcasts and other multimedia materials, assignments, simulations that either licensed under open copyright license like Creative Commons or others in the public domain. Users have the liberty to access the OER and also have free permits to use them. When one accesses the OER, they are able to revise (adapt and improve the basic OER materials according to the context), reuse (use the authentic OER based on the latest version designed by the user and these can apply to a broad dimension of contexts), remix (integrate or “mash-up” the authentic OER with other OER to produce new materials) and redistribute (duplicate copies and share the original OER or the latest version with the community). Ten years since the launch of OER and after two major global declarations by UNESCO, Commonwealth of learning (COL) and others, the impact that these freely available resources make on educational systems is not clear [5].

The OER phenomenon is increasingly popular among policy-makers and practitioners of education which encompass teachers, trainers, lecturers and professors where the main aim is to provide educational resources available for free through non-commercial internet services. This has been realized through advocacy by major inter-governmental agencies like UNESCO and COL, as well as innovators in educational provision like the Khan Academy, CK-12 Foundation and MIT Open Courseware (OCW). Currently, a recent advent in this open trajectory is the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). They are spearheaded by Harvard and MIT (which together founded online platform edX) and business enterprises such as Coursera, Udemy, Udacity and others that provide free access to entire courses. Dhanarajan and Abeywardena [6] argued that OER has been promoted by advocates around the globe as one viable solution to address some of the challenges of access, quality and cost in higher education.

Although OERs have gained prominence globally in the higher education arena, developments are seriously lagging among the Asian countries and the governments play a significant role in terms of policy implementation and ensuring the extent of OER dominance [4]. The survey conducted by Dhanarajan and Abewardena [6] entitled Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective, reveals some pertinent insights as to the various Asean countries’ familiarity with and awareness of OERs. The following table reveals the emerging trends.

Table 1. Familiarity with and Awareness of OER

Country	Familiarity and awareness			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total (N)
South Korea	74.20%	16.10%	9.70%	100.00%
China	55.60%	29.10%	15.30%	100.00%
Indonesia	71.10%	18.40%	10.50%	100.00%
India	52.10%	29.20%	18.80%	100.00%
Malaysia	69.60%	13.00%	17.40%	100.00%

South Korea has recorded the highest (74.20%) in terms of familiarity and awareness of OER while 16.10% are unaware and a small percentage are unsure (9.70%) of the term OER. Indonesia has a high (71.10%) number of people who are aware and familiar with OER and only 18.40 percent are unaware of it. Malaysia recorded a reasonably average (69.60%) number being familiar and aware of OER. The countries that are low in percentage as to the extent of familiarity and awareness of OER are China (55.60%) and India (52.10%). Dhanarajan and Porter [4] reiterated that OER needs to be popularised where greater efforts are required at knowledge-building, especially amongst policy makers and institutional management, have to be enhanced. Such knowledge-building has to be comprehensive and current as those in decision-making positions must be aware of the existence of OER, in what contexts and how they have been used, how to gain access to them, what technologies and skills are required for teachers and learners alike to access them, and the pedagogical and economic benefits of OER.

According to Kim [7], The Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has tried to build a next-generation IT infrastructure to boost university adoption of information and communications technology (ICT) practices and the quality of educational services, and thereby bolster the international competitiveness of Korean higher education. An educational network was primarily constructed by Seoul National University's Center for Educational Research in 1991 and was intended to serve as a nationwide backbone network linking nine universities, including Gangwon University. Kim [7] reported on a survey that was conducted among 64 participants who were attached to education-related organisations and had either developed educational materials by taking advantage of OER or had used OER in their teaching. In her report, 61 completed questionnaires from individuals who had experience in OER were analysed, along with a small number of completed questionnaires representing the institution's opinions or data. Kim [7] also pointed out that in order to sustain the success of OER, issues related to copyright have to be resolved and the quality has to be maintained. Hence, it was proposed that the Creative Commons licences should be introduced to address this issue and the quality of OER should be assessed from various perspectives. Her report proposed that instructors should get permission to use necessary resources from authors or publishers, and an appropriate quality assurance system should be set up to guarantee the quality of OER materials. It was stressed that such a system would ensure the legality and quality of OER by preventing the sharing of materials whose copyright has yet to be determined or which cannot be used for educational purposes. The methods and criteria of quality assurance should be prepared and outlined in detail [7].

Indonesia has taken various initiatives in advocating OER where there the movement is encouraging in terms of the manner in which knowledge is being produced, disseminated and shared in that country [8]. This movement is construed as people's prerogative of access to information and educational materials as OER has gained prominence for sharing and exchanging educational materials to enhance quality education. They [8] argued that sufficient information about the extent of OER adoption and practice has not reached Indonesia. A survey across Indonesian universities that actively utilised information and communication technology for their teaching and learning strategies was conducted to collect information about OER practices [8]. The findings highlight that OER is popular and the intention to use OER is well received. The

respondents in the survey communicated that OER has the potential to upgrade the standards of teaching and learning by enabling free access to various resources. Findings also revealed that there were no evident threats of copyright violation despite the fact that knowledge about the third-party content and Creative Commons licenses was still very low. However, it was found that the policy on OER was disintegrated due to the lack of mutual cooperation at the national and international levels. The respondents in this survey demonstrated low motivation in producing OER and there is a disparity if compared to the high interest in using OER. Daryono and Belawati [8] lamented that practices related to OER is still considered to be at the rudimentary stage and this is the result of improper policy and infrastructure to promote OER practices within universities.

In 2003, China Open Resources for Education (CORE), a collaborative venture, was formed by universities to promote and apply open educational resources (OER) in higher education across China. CORE has developed to a certain extent and the concept of open education has limited scope, development and influence in China [9]. They conducted a study to analyse and report on the current situation of OER use and development in mainland China, on the basis of investigations of member institutions and individuals participating in the CORE initiative. The findings revealed that the familiarity and awareness of OER is still very minimal among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Yawan and Ying [9] reiterated that China's HEIs have equipped individuals with the basic facilities for OER to be published and used. However, neither institutions nor individuals have a deep understanding of OER, and this deficit has affected their willingness to publish or use OER. They also highlight that institutions and individuals are encouraged by the availability of free OER but are concerned about copyright issues and there exists a lack of sufficient knowledge about copyright and open licences, though institutions are more experienced than individuals in this perspective. Findings also emphasise that institutions and individuals agree that the primary barrier to their use of OER results from lack of knowledge of OER. Besides that, individuals are more concerned with OER quality and the skills that required for effective OER use, whilst institutions are more concerned with the incentive mechanisms that will promote individuals' use of OER and in this regard, institutions and individuals agree that lack of an incentive mechanism [9].

Abeywardena, Dhanarajan and Lim [10] highlighted that OER is a relatively new concept in the Malaysian higher education (HE) sector. In their study, a survey was conducted among respondents from 15 public, private not-for-profit and private for-profit HE institutions. The main objective of the survey was to obtain an overview of the Malaysian HE landscape in regards to digital resources and OER use. The findings showcased the growing popularity in usage of OER among academics as majority of the respondents had knowledge about OER, had practical experience of using OER and are motivated to further use it when the opportunity arises. They argued that there is the lack of co-operation between academic institutions when producing and exchanging OER. They were also of the opinion that the culture of collaboration between institutions needs to be established to facilitate the full potential of open content. In the study, respondents conveyed their concern as to copyright and the management of copyright. Even though academics had been exposed to open content licences such as those provided by Creative Commons, there was still a degree of trepidation with respect to using material licensed in this manner [10]. The study proposed that more capacity building is needed at an institutional as well as national level to familiarise users with the benefits and limitations of open content licensing. Findings indicated that from an institutional perspective, fewer than five percent of staff are engaged in activities related to OER. As such, most institutions do not have an institutional policy on OER. Other concerns surrounding effective use of OERs, especially in the creation and sharing of OERs is the ethical aspect of a learning material to be 'legally' constituted as OER [11]. He argued that learning materials need to possess the proper licensing (Creative Commons, for instance) for it to be considered as OER and to be made freely available to all. In general, lack of awareness on these concerns

has discouraged many staff from undertaking OER-based activities on a day-to-day basis, as there are no rewards or recognition for their efforts. One of the key actions to promote greater adoption of OER in Malaysia would be for institutions to establish policies encouraging the wider use and reuse of open content [10].

University Sains Malaysia has taken various initiatives to develop and disseminate OER where the main aim is ensure equitable access to knowledge, learning and development of Open CourseWare to the public especially since receiving the status of APEX in 2008 [12]. Various plans and strategies have been formulated in order to make OER@USM a reality. Apart from supporting the USM APEX transformation plan with regards to nurturing and teaching, the development of OER@USM is also targeted to make USM known globally as a leading sustainability-led university. OER@USM aims to facilitate the provision of free quality education and one of the important aspects in the successful implementation of an OER initiative is the support rendered by the top management of the university as well as the cooperation and participation from the various faculties. The top management of the university was briefed on the planning, development, and implementation of OER, and the proposals for relevant policies and guidelines were tabled at a USM ICT Council meeting for its approval [12]. The proposal plans received support and were approved by the Council; subsequently, the university is providing the financial resources and manpower to carry out such an initiative. The lecturers were introduced to the concept of OER and its importance and their participation was solicited. A one-day seminar was also organised to provide exposure to the participants on OER and the roles that they were required to assume. Various discussions, workshops, and trainings have been organised by the Centre for Development of Academic Excellence to strategise and formulate the necessary models and process workflows to ensure the successful development of OER@USM. Sufficient manpower and financial resources have also been made available by USM to ensure the sustainability of the development and implementation of OER@USM.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The objectives of the study are to explore the perceptions of English language teachers in a public Malaysian university on the Open Educational Resources (OERs) in their teaching, with regards to the creation of the resources, sharing of the resource with their colleagues and the usage of these resources in the classrooms. The study was guided by these following research questions:

RQ1. What do English language teachers in a public university in Malaysia know about OERs?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of English language teachers on:

- a) Using OERs
- b) Creating OERs
- c) Sharing OERs

3.2. Research Design

The study was conducted using the quantitative approach. The quantitative approach was selected because it is able to describe trends of a certain group of people and also reveal how this tendency can vary among this group of people. In this study, the instrument was used to elicit the perception of English language teachers about creating, sharing and using OERs in their teaching. The data were analysed to identify the trends and behaviours of the respondents.

3.3. Research Sample

The sample targeted for this study was English language teachers at Universiti Sains Malaysia, a premier public university in Malaysia. A total of 35 English language teachers from the School of Languages,

Literacies and Translation participated in this study. All of them teach English proficiency courses offered by the School which are compulsory for the undergraduates of the university to complete for graduation.

Table 2. Respondents' Years of Teaching Experience

Years	N	%
0 – 5 years	10	28.6
6 -10 years	9	25.7
11 -15 years	6	17.1
16 -20 years	3	8.6
More than 20 years	7	20.0

About 65% of respondents in this survey have less than 10 years of teaching experience, followed by those who have more than 20 years of teaching experience (20%). There are only 3 respondents (8.6%) have about 16 to years of teaching experience while about 17% of the respondents have at least 11 to 15 years of teaching experience.

3.4. Research Instrument

In this study, the researchers chose to use surveys to collect the data. Survey research is used to describe trends, important beliefs and attitudes of a group of individuals [13]. This study seeks to explore the perceptions of Malaysian English language teachers in creating, sharing and using of OERs in their teaching.

There were altogether 13 questions in the questionnaire. The first 3 questions were used to elicit personal information about the respondents such as their place of employment, years of working and the language they use to teach. Questions 4, 7 and 8 were used to know the respondents' opinions about the OERs they use. In Questions 9 and 10, the respondents were asked to indicate which types of educational resources they create, share and use in their classrooms. Questions 11, 12 and 13 utilised a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

3.5. Procedure

The process of collecting data was conducted at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia. A total of 50 surveys were distributed to the English language teachers, but only 35 were returned. After completion, the surveys were collected and analysed.

The items in the survey were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0. Firstly, the data were analysed using the descriptive analysis, which indicated general tendencies in the data. In this study, the data were examined in terms of frequencies and mean scores. In addition, the relationship between two variables such as years of experience and perceptions of the respondents were analysed.

4. Findings and Discussion

When the respondents were asked about the types of OERs that they have heard of, majority of them have heard of at least two types of resources on the Internet.

Table 3 shows the types of OERs that the respondents have heard of. Majority of them (80%) said that they have heard of Open Coursewares (OCWs) that are offered by other universities such as Harvard and Stanford in the United States. Around 75% of the respondents are also familiar with the resources from YouTube, while about 45% of the respondents are aware of the resources from iTunesU. However, it is surprising that the respondents are not familiar with the resources made available in E-learn (14.3%) as the university uses E-learn as a platform for online teaching and learning.

Table 3. Types of OERs the Respondents Know of

	N	%
OCWs	28	80.0
MIT	9	25.7
YouTube	26	74.3
iTunesU	16	45.7
E-learn	5	14.3

When asked about the definition of OERs, many of the respondents replied that OERs are...

“...an alternative resources for teaching and learning...”

“ ...freely accessible software...”

“...shared learning-teaching materials online...”

These comments show that the respondents are aware that OERs and should be made free to be shared by everyone to make the teaching-learning process become more interactive and effective.

However, there are still a small number of respondents (about 10%) who said that they “do not know what OER is” and they “do not know anything about OER”. Their reaction can be perceived as completely having no knowledge about OERs and to that effect, these teachers were unaware of the existence of it.

When asked about the sources of their teaching materials, the respondents listed out the sources of where they obtained their teaching materials.

Table 4. The Sources of the Teaching Materials

	N	%
Online textbook/publishers	33	94.3
Professional bodies /society	9	25.7
Academic colleagues	19	54.3
Colleagues in my department	16	45.7
Academic colleagues from other institutions	6	17.1
The internet	31	88.6
My own resources	21	60.0

Table 5. Resources Are Made Available

	N	%
Academic colleagues I work closely with	21	60.0
Academic colleagues in my department	20	57.1
Academic colleagues outside my department, but within my institution	5	14.3
Academic colleagues outside my institution	7	20.0
Everyone who wants them	12	34.3
I do not make my resources available to others	3	8.6

The majority of the respondents obtained their teaching materials from the online textbooks or publishers (94.3%) and from the Internet (88.6%). It is followed by the teachers’ own resources which they created themselves (60%), some respondents share their resources with other academic staff (54.3%) and

other staff in their own department (45.7%). Other resources from which they obtained the teaching materials are from professional bodies or society they are a member in (25.7%) and academicians from another institutions (17.1%).

The respondents were asked whether they will share their resources. More than 50% of them have no problems sharing their teaching resources with anyone who wants them.

More than half of the respondents revealed that they share their teaching resources with those who are close to them, for instance, academic colleagues whom they work closely with (60.0%) and academic colleagues who belong in the same department (57.1%). The respondents are willing to share their resources with anyone who wants the resources with 34.3% and academicians from other institutions with 20.0%. However, there are some respondents who are not willing to share their resources (8.6%).

In terms of creating resources for teaching and learning, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they have already created the resources or they have not, and want to learn how to.

Table 6. What Kinds of Resources do You Create?

	Yes %	No %	I want to learn more %
Web pages	17.1	20.0	62.9
Animations	2.9	20.0	77.1
Video clips	20.0	14.3	65.7
Podcasts	5.7	25.7	68.6
Powerpoint presentations	85.7	0	14.3
Word documents	94.3	5.7	0
Multiple choice questions	91.4	2.9	5.7
Essay questions	94.3	2.9	2.9
Pictures	60.0	11.4	28.6

Table 7. Perceptions on Using OERs Created by Others

	Mean
Using OERs in teaching can save time and money	3.31
I only use resources developed by someone I know and trust	2.80
I prefer to develop my own resources	2.57
I have trouble findings resources of high quality	2.54
It is not easy to adapt resources to meet my needs	2.40
I don't like using other people's resources because they need reworking	2.26
I don't really know where to find useful resources	1.80

As shown in Table 6, respondents were asked to indicate their efforts in creating teaching resources, and which resource they hope to learn more. Majority of the respondents have created common teaching materials such as PowerPoint presentations (85.7%), Word documents (94.3%), multiple choice questions (91.4%) and essay questions (94.3%). These resources are common in the Malaysian teaching and learning environment as these are the basic format of the examinations. The types of resources that are more challenging to be developed are web pages (20.0%), animations (20.0%) and podcasts (25.7%). Clearly, these resources need special software and skills, which the respondents have to learn and master. Thus, the types of resources that the respondents would like to learn more about are those resources which require skills, time and some special software such as web pages (62.0%), animations (77.1%), video clips (65.7%)

and podcasts (68.6%).

Besides creating their own teaching resources, the respondents were asked whether they use OERs created by other people.

Table 7 above shows that the respondents have mixed feelings about using OERs created from other parties. Firstly, the respondents think that using OERs certainly saves time and money, with a mean score of 3.31. On the other hand, many of the respondents are careful when choosing the suitable teaching resources to use in their classrooms. They said they “only use resources developed by people they know and trust” with a mean score of 2.80. However, some of the respondents “prefer to develop their own resources” (mean score 2.57) and they “don’t like using other people’s resources because they need to rework on them”(mean score of 2.26). There were also some respondents who said they “have trouble finding high quality resources” (mean score 2.54) and “ it is not easy to find resources that suit their needs” (mean score 2.40). From the mean scores, most of the respondents have no difficulty in finding teaching resources that can be used in their teaching.

The respondents were then asked whether they share the teaching resources they have created. It is true they share teaching resources which include the examination components such as Word documents, multiple choice questions and essay questions.

Table 8. Do You Share Any of the Resources?

	Yes %	No %
Web pages	25.7	74.3
Animations	14.3	85.7
Video clips	20.0	80.0
Podcasts	14.3	85.7
Powerpoint presentations	71.4	28.6
Word documents	71.4	28.6
Multiple choice questions	77.1	23.8
Essay questions	85.7	14.3
Pictures	60.0	11.5

When talking about sharing teaching resources, the respondents said that they do share their teaching resources (as shown in Table 8 above). The teaching resources they share are powerpoint presentations (71.4%), word documents (71.4%), multiple choice questions (77.1%) and essay questions (85.7%). However, the teaching resources that they do not share are resources that they borrowed or adapted from another source such as the Internet. These resources are web pages (65.7%), animations (80.0%), video clips (74.3%) and podcasts (77.1%).

From the Table 9 below, the respondents have a high tendency to share their teaching resources. The respondents agreed that sharing resources can save time and money with a mean score of 3.46. They also agreed that they can enhance their reputation and their institution’s reputation when they share their teaching resources with mean scores of 3.29 and 3.23 respectively. Furthermore, the issues of recognition and acknowledgments are very important for the respondents, scoring 3.00 for the mean score. However, some respondents are concerned with other people changing the resources they developed (mean score of 1.97) and copyright issue with regards to their teaching resources (mean score of 1.86). Some respondents prefer not to share their resources which they have spent so much time on them.

Table 9. Perceptions on Sharing OERs

	Mean
Sharing resources can enhance my reputation as a teacher	3.29
Sharing resources can enhance the reputation of my institution	3.23
Sharing resources can save time and money	3.46
I want to be acknowledged as the author of the resources that I have shared	3.00
I do not want other people to be able to change the resources I have shared	1.97
I do not share as I have spent a lot of time preparing them	1.86
I am concerned about copyright issue if I share my resources	3.17

5. Conclusion

Effective utilization of open educational resources (OERs) offers significant opportunities for both instructors and learners to engage in more productive outcome of the teaching and learning process. Awareness towards the various formats of OERs also allows these stakeholders to be able to search and identify OERs that can be used to improve one's learning or to enhance one's teaching. This study was conducted in light of the emerging trends of OERs use in the educational community. Findings of this study have provided the insights into the creation, sharing and using of OERs particularly among English Language teachers in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), one of the premier public university in Malaysia.

Universiti Sains Malaysia had initiated the creation, sharing and use of OERs among its instructors as an effective measure to encourage the instructors to engage in e-learning and ensure that e-learning remains as an integral component in their teaching. This measure is in line with the University's vision to transform higher education for a sustainable tomorrow, and this endeavor has been backed up by the University's Centre of Development of Academic Excellence (CDAE) in the promotions of workshops and trainings to support staff to actively interact with OERs. In a nutshell, it is clear that OERs have the potential to be utilized as learning materials of high quality and this exponential growth of OERs in the educational landscape is definitely here to stay.

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