

EARLY EXPERIENCES OF THE COURSE CONVERSION TO OER PROCESS AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

Doreen Mushi

Assistant Lecturer and Instructional Designer

The Open University of Tanzania

Email: doreenkaduma@gmail.com

Brenda Mallinson

Learning Technologies Consultant

South African Institute of Distance Education

Email: brendam@saide.org.za

Track Session: Integration of Open Practices

Session Format: Presentation

Goals/Intended Outcomes

The main aim is to share early experiences obtained from the process of converting ordinary open and distance learning courses to Open Educational Resources. The report describes the process, the activities involved, lessons learned and the proposed improvements. The findings will provide insights to other institutions and stakeholders that are in the process of converting their learning materials to openly licenced content.

Intended Audience

The study targets OER stakeholders from organizations and academic institutions that are engaged in the creation and production of Open Education Resources. The stakeholders include academic staff, students, researchers and OER specialists that are carrying out projects involving transforming learning materials to OER.

Introduction

The deployment of Open Education Resources (OER) in facilitating the open provision of quality online education in higher learning institutions has been growing. Institutions worldwide have been partnering and collaborating by forming initiatives that would reduce costs, increase access and improve quality of education (D'Antoni, 2009).

The Open University of Tanzania is an academic institution offering education to the public through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. The University has over 40,000 degree students located over 30 regional centres and more than 70 study centres in Tanzania and abroad. In order to cater for the scattered student groups, the University is now employing various practices using technology to promote access to teaching and learning (OUT, 2015).

In order to promote the movement of OER to its community, the University has been involved in various initiatives that support the use and creation of OER among its students and faculty. Furthermore, the University has been facilitating capacity building workshops with the purpose of raising awareness around the importance and potential of the affordance of OER in improving pedagogical practice. These projects have been supported by various partners including Commonwealth of Learning (COL), UNESCO and the South African Institute for Education (SAIDE) through its OER Africa initiative. The project of converting existing OER courses to OER is among these supported activities and is the focus of this paper.

In this project two ODL courses, Philosophy of Education and Teaching (OEF 101) and Commercial Law (OLW 304), were identified as suitable courses to be converted into OER for open provision. The criteria for selection of these two courses were based on the high proportion of resources already developed for the course and availability of the subject matter experts (lecturers) during the entire period of the activity and subsequent completion process.

The Workflow Process - starting point

The University adapted the dScribe (digital and distributed scribes) process (Open.Michigan, 2012) as the guiding draft workflow process for converting the OUT ODL courses to OER. dScribe was developed within the Open Michigan initiative at the University of Michigan, and involves faculty who are supported by student helps (dScribes) during the process of creating their open content. At OUT, academics with the desire to convert their courses to OERs were identified with a view to using their existing courses and web resources as the supporting resources. The dScribe support was to be provided mainly by staff of a centralised OUT unit, the Institute for Educational and Management Technology (IEMT), who were starting to gain expertise in using OER. The initial step for the successful creation of the open content, was for the academic staff to be guided towards connecting and collaborating with the supporting team and make efficient use of available existing materials (OER or otherwise licensed).

Setting up the process stages

OUT collaborated with two OER specialists from OER Africa to discuss and agree on the procedures that will be following during the conversion process. The team from OUT comprised two subject matter experts (lecturers for the Commercial Law and Philosophy courses), e-learning specialists and other stakeholders who are involved in OER initiatives and projects at the university. It was agreed that the following six steps adapted from the dScribe (Open.Michigan, 2012) process should be adhered to in the process of converting the two courses:

Preparing and ensuring that the existing content is in an appropriate format

Subject matter experts are tasked with ensuring that their courses are available in digital form and they are developed according to the OUT in-house style format. This includes elements such as course description, learning outcomes, summaries, review questions, and references.

Copyright clearance

This stage involves reviewing course content and making sure that it is correctly referenced (ensuring that there is acknowledgement of who owns the intellectual property by obtaining author's / right owners' permission). The stage also involves checking for plagiarism and includes adaption and use of relevant openly licensed materials to support the course content.

Selecting and inserting the relevant creative commons licenses

Subject matter experts will select the appropriate creative commons licenses that will guide the public on further reuse of the material. This is guided by the licences of any existing content, as well as the preferred open license adopted by the University.

Integrating multimedia in the content

The stage involved incorporating multimedia elements to make the material more interactive and engaging. Once again, existing content licenses should be adhered to, and original media should be licenses as guided by University policy.

Identifying a portal whereby the courses will be deposited

Selection of relevant repositories to upload and release the course content online. In the first instance, this would be made available in the OUT Open Repository, and then indexing in further appropriate repositories can be investigated.

Publishing the courses for distribution

Making the material known and publically available to the wider academic community and monitor the usage of the OER (views, downloads etc) using web analytics software.

Working Retreat

The activity of setting up the initial process was followed up by a five day workshop retreat to carry out the process with five participants: three OUT OER support staff and two OUT subject matter experts (lecturers).

The workshop started with a session which introduced the lecturers to the basic concepts of OERs, licensing and repositories. The lecturers were then guided through copyright clearance and how they should go about ensuring that their content is well referenced. This was the main activity of the workshop. It took lecturers a considerable amount of time to modify their content systematically and follow up on licence specifications from the source documents.

The workshop schedule encompassed activities addressing content preparation, copyright clearance, creative commons licences at the end of each day, the lecturers undertook a reflection on the successes and challenges of the day's activities, and elaborated on their related experiences of the course conversion process.

At the end of the retreat 10 of 20 chapters of each of the two courses were successfully converted into OER. This involved clearance of copyrighted material and application of anti-plagiarism software to detect any traces of plagiarised content. The next step was to select an appropriate creative commons license that would be used on the course material. The team chose CC by Attribution licence and it was reflected in all course modules. In addition, OUT OER portal has been identified as the repository for the courses but publication of this material will remain pending until the institutional OER Policy has been finalised. Due to time limitations the authors were not able to add OER multimedia to the courses during this retreat.

Lessons learned and areas of improvement

The daily reflection sessions for the lecturer participants provided their comments based on their experience for that particular day. The following issues were presented as challenges of the process:

Lack of an OER policy at the institution

At the time the workshop was taking place, OUT was still in the process of developing an OER policy that would have guided the implementation of OER related activity at the university. Given that this activity was to pilot the conversion process, the lessons learned can inform the operationalisation of the policy.

Plagiarism Checking Capabilities

During the workshop period, the University did not have plagiarism detection software that could be used to screen for plagiarised content and incorrectly referenced material. The team overcame this by downloading and deploying a freely available tool that had some limitations when used in this *ad hoc* manner. (OUT Report, 2015)

Complexity of copyright clearance activity

The process of replacing copyrighted material was considered time consuming and in way it could affect the pedagogical aspect of the course content. Subject matter experts found it hard to replace material that was referenced from old books and resources that have not been digitised. In addition, finding relevant OER from repositories was difficult due to the nature of the subjects (Law and Philosophy) and the relative inexperience of the team in this area.

Overall Post-Retreat Feedback

Both lectures expressed to the OER Africa support person that in future, they would develop their courses differently from the start. They would be sure to keep track of their references accurately from the beginning, and write materials using their own words, and without incorporating direct quotes from other authors.

With the University subsequently having purchased the use of proprietary plagiarism detection software, both these pilot courses will be checked through and the report analysed thoroughly before the courses are made available as OER on the OUT Open Repository.

It was agreed that the OER course materials should be available in a variety of formats with appropriate associated meta-data:

- Text document incorporating the entire course materials (textual and graphic) hyperlinked from a contents page. License to be displayed as document footer.
- Moodle backup course available for download (incorporating all text, graphics and media) with functional activities and clear learning pathway. Each course element to be licensed as appropriate.

Conversion Process Recommendations

Process Revision: The considerable time necessary for copyright clearance of course materials was even more substantial than anticipated. While the 6 person pilot team comprising support and lecturing staff undertook a retreat to proof the process, this will not be possible in future and the process needs to be refined to become a sustainable part of academic activity. A realistic work schedule should be negotiated with each lecturer in order to achieve this, and lecturers who undertake this task may be encouraged by institutional reward structures. The work flow should include personnel from the Quality Assurance Unit to undertake a final review of the materials, and finally personnel from the University Library who will perform the final stage of the process in mounting the OER materials on the OUT Open Repository. The open licence chosen should be in accordance with the approved University default licence unless motivated otherwise.

Institutional Support:

The new institutional OER Policy should be finalised and passed through the appropriate University approval structures as soon as possible in order to provide a solid foundation from which to operationalise OER procedures and processes. The OER group from the IEMT will

establish themselves as the institutional support team available to lecturers who wish to undertake the course conversion process.

References

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