Demanding Role of Open Education Resources for Distance Education Universities in Pakistan

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Abstract

In this age of technology, Information technology has surpassed all others in the race of technological development. Internet is called a superhighway which made the global knowledge accessible for all. In this speedy age it is necessary for the survival of every individual to equip itself with latest knowledge so as to remain update to meet the current needs of time. In distance education, open education resources play a significant role in providing easy access to latest educational material. Every individual, teachers and even self-learners can get maximum benefits from it. In this age, access to books is difficult as well as expensive so the concern for OERs (Open Education Resources) has increased as these are less expensive and easily accessible, and so these sources prove to be a blessing for the learners in their research as well as in their studies. This study was conducted to (i) identify the need of open education resources in distance education, (ii) explore the role of open education resources in distance education universities.

A sample of 110 students of M.Phil / Ph.D. of AIOU Islamabad was taken conveniently. A questionnaire was used as a research tool for the collection of data and instrument reliability was checked. Collected data was analyzed by mean score and percentage. Main findings of the

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study revealed that OERs have positive effect on distance education students' learning, research and professional development. Hence proper utilization and availability of OERs are needed in Distance Education to facilitate its learners in best way. Open universities may take initiative to develop such repositories in every department.

Key words: OERs, Significant, Awareness, Positive, Learning

Introduction

Distance education (DE) is a mode of education in which students and teachers are separated by time and space. They have no daily face to face interaction like in the formal system of education but are connected through correspondence and other Media like internet, radio, television, etc. Distance education institutes provide great educational services to those learners who are deprived of getting education through formal system. This system is making great contribution to nation building as well as in increasing literacy ratio. Distance education universities facilitate and equip their learners with latest knowledge to a great extent in order to compete in this world of competition. And for this purpose different mediums are used to bridge the gap between the teacher and the learner.

According to Sangi, (2005) Distance Education is a non-traditional system of education in which learners and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes by time. Similarly, Simonson (2000, P.5) defines distance education as, "Institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated geographically and interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors".

Students in distance learning situations are now active participants in learning, which is not always true in traditional settings. As active participants, there must be a sense of ownership as to the learning goals, establishing a sense of autonomy, self-control and interdependence (Savery and Duffy, 1995). As an active learner, the students will put forth the effort if they believe in the relevance of the material and it has meaning to him or her (Saettler, 1990). A national survey of teachers involved in distance learning (Clark, 1993) demonstrates a fairly strong negative attitude of faculty directly involved in face to face teaching, while those not directly involved were more positive.

In this era, Internet is playing a superb role in education especially in distance education. It has brought abrupt, speedy and revolutionary changes in the field of education and research. Innovations in education occur due to technology with such a speed which we cannot expect few decades before. Desmond Keegan believes that distance learning must do everything possible to recreate the teacher-learner model as an interactive experience (Keegan 1986). According to Sherry (1996, p.346) "this is the basis of the Iowa Model that does everything possible to create traditional, face-to-face instruction using teleconferencing combined with audio-visual interaction." All the development in education is due to the use of internet. Internet and technology has made the access of every individual pretty easy to latest knowledge all over the world. Internet also make possible to explore speedy ways of sharing knowledge and information from universities and colleges to a wide range of users and specially open

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education resources have great significance in easy access to different modules, textbooks, lectures, videos, so that to get maximum benefits by whole world's educational sources. Open Education Resources is a relatively new phenomenon which may be seen as a part of a larger trend towards openness in higher education. Open Educational Resources (OERs) is a term used for any educational material that is freely available on the Internet. Open education resources have great significance in facilitating the distance education system.

According to (Rowntree, 1994), "Open learning materials are materials put together in such a way that users can learn from them satisfactorily with less shelf than useful for a teacher." There is not any authentic definition for OERs, it is described as:

"Digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research" (J, Hylén, 2007).

According to another definition Open Educational Resources (OER) is a term used to describe:

"Teaching and learning 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. 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" (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2009).

In 2002 UNESCO held a Forum consist of some people who "wished to develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity". *(http://opencontent.org/blog)*

Further, OER is said to include:

Learning Content: Full courses, courseware, content modules, learning objects, collections and journals

Tools: Software to support the development, use, re-use and delivery of learning content including searching and organization of content, content and learning management systems, content development tools, and on-line learning communities.

Implementation Resources: Intellectual property licenses to promote open publishing of materials, design principles of best practice, and localization of content. (OECD, 2007)

Open ERs are very helpful for the researchers and the student in their studies. The students can get easy and quick access to latest educational material in no cost through OERs. Open education resources (OERs) are the resources where educators and learners have free access to high quality educational resources, independent of their location. There are no territory boundaries and other restrictions in using these resources. Anyone anywhere can use these resources easily, only one needs an internet connection.

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Keeping in mind the current needs, there are four major ways that OERs can be used and changed as described by (Wiley, 2007)

"Reuse — use the work accurately, just exactly as you found it.

Rework — alter or modify the work so that it better meets your needs.

Remix — combine the (verbatim or altered) work with other works to better meet your needs.

Redistribute — share the verbatim work, the reworked work, or the remixed work with others."

Looking by future perspective OERs have great importance because this is the age of competition and without adopting the current trends no one can move further. Only those nations and individuals survive in this world who emphasis on adopting latest trends. Internet has made the world a global village, anyone anywhere can access thousand miles away a person and can share and take benefit by knowledge available over net. It is difficult, expensive and time consuming to move to libraries and to buy books so OERs help greatly in facilitating the knowledge searchers to access the latest educational material to satisfy their thirst in less time and low cost. So in this respect OERs are like great blessing for the teachers and learners to access the learning content of the whole world's educational contributors for quality education and the basic objective of OER initiative is to have open movement worldwide to explore the effective and efficient systems to create, share and evolve open educational learning materials.

In open educational resource initiatives, resources like the ones listed above are made widely accessible across the globe with low and no cost. The impact of open educational resource initiatives is potentially huge for learners, educators and educational institutions in the next years.

Purpose of the study

The study was designed to identify the need of open education resources and to explore the role of open education resources in distance education universities.

Research Methodology

Sampling

The study was descriptive in nature so survey was considered appropriate for this study. 110 students of M.phil / Ph.D. of AIOU Islamabad were taken as population.

Development of instrument

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In this survey a questionnaire on five points (Likert Scale) was used for the collection of data. In the questionnaire items were asked about the need of OERs, uses of OERs, role of OERs in distance education system so that to elicit the valuable opinions of the respected respondents.

Administration of research tool

The questionnaire was administered personally to the students who were present in their workshop at AIOU main campus Islamabad and some by mail. The researcher received 108 questionnaires back out of 110 which were finally analyzed.

Analysis of data

The data collected through questionnaires was analyzed by applying percentage and mean score.

Table 1: Need of open education resources

S. No	Statements	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	%	Mean
01	Open education resources (OERs) are the need of existing time.	36	66	03	03	0	94.6	4.25
02	OERs fulfill the research requirement of distance learners.	48	54	06	0	0	94.5	4.39
03	To some extent OERs are the alternate of teacher for distance learners.	21	45	18	24	0	61.2	3.58
04	OERs are helpful in professional development.	42	57	06	03	0	91.7	3.89
05	OERs generate sense of competition in distance learners.	15	54	18	18	03	63.9	3.56

Scale value of this table is SA (Strongly Agree) =5, A (Agree) =4, UNC (Uncertain) =3, DA (Disagree) =2, SDA (Strongly Disagree) =1

Table 1 shows that open education resources are the essential need of the present time, and these fulfill the study and research requirements and are helpful in professional development and generate sense of competition among the distance learners. Majority of the respondents agreed that open education resources are helpful for distance learners to fulfill their specific needs. Mean score for all the statements is above than 3.56 which support the statements.

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Table 2: Role of OERs

S. No	Statements	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	%	Mean
01	OERs are excellent source of sharing knowledge.	33	60	09	03	03	86.2	4.09
02	Open education resources enhance the learning of students.	15	72	15	06	0	80.6	3.89
03	OERs equalize the knowledge among the learners.	30	60	15	03	0	83.4	4.06
04	OERs results in meaningful learning.	33	48	12	12	03	75.1	3.89
05	OERs increase competition among the self learners.	21	73	05	09	0	87.1	3.98

Scale value of this table is SA (Strongly Agree) =5, A (Agree) =4, UNC (Uncertain) =3, DA (Disagree) =2, SDA **(Strongly Disagree) =1**

Table 2 indicates that OERs are excellent source of sharing knowledge, enhance the learning of students, equalize the knowledge among the learners, results in meaningful learning and also increase competition among the self-learners. Majority of the respondents agreed that open education resources play a significant role in distance education universities and facilitate the students by different angles. Mean score for all the statements is above than 3.89 which support the statements.

Conclusions

Open education resources are of great importance with respect of distance education. Open education resources are the essential need of existing time, and these fulfill the study and research requirements as well as helpful in professional development and generate sense of competition among the distance learners. OERs are excellent sources of sharing knowledge. These enhance the learning of students, equalize the knowledge among the learners, results in meaningful learning and also increase competition among the self-learners. So OERs play a significant role in distance learning system. The need is to adopt this trend for flexible learning.

Recommendations

It may be very essential to acknowledge the OERs movement to meet the contemporary educational requirements in DE universities. University planners may suggest developing repositories in various departments for students' easy access. Distance education universities may also provide the facility of e-library to their students via OERs. University authorities and planners of distance education may make effort to implement this trend in order to provide

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online latest materials to the students and teachers. Similarly awareness campaign about the benefits of OERs may also help to promote the implementation of OERs trend. Distance education universities may accept OER movement for flexible and quality learning as well as it may be very essential for DE universities to acknowledge the OERs movement to meet the contemporary educational requirements.

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