National Consultation on OER Policy for Higher Education in India: Workshop Report

By: Mr. Neil Butcher
    South Africa

Introduction

On the request of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi, organized a National Consultation Workshop on an Open Educational Resource (OER) Policy for Higher Education in India. The workshop took place at Hotel Oodles in Chattarpur New Delhi on the Friday 3rd March, 2017. The workshop was attended by Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, and other representatives of higher education institutions in India, representatives of various relevant government departments, Councils, and Centres, and CEMCA personnel. A full participants' list is attached as Appendix Two to this report.

This brief report summarizes the proceedings of the workshop and highlights the emerging policy considerations agreed by the workshop and the subsequent meeting of the Advisory Cum Consultative Committee.

Introductory Presentations

The workshop commenced with three sessions in which presentations were made, which set the scene for the subsequent group discussions and plenary deliberations. The following presentations were made:
- Opening Session
  - Welcome of the guests and Introduction of the National Consultation: Dr. Shahid Rasool, Director CEMCA
  - Keynote Address (See Appendix Three): Prof. V.S. Prasad, Former Director, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).
  - Remarks by the Chief Guest / Guest of Honour: Dr. B K Bhadri, Educational Advisor, MHRD
  - Presidential Address: Prof. Nageshwar Rao, Vice Chancellor, Uttarakhand Open University
  - Vote of Thanks: Dr. Manas Ranjan Panigrahi, CEMCA, New Delhi
- Presentation on 'OER Policy Development and International Practices' by Mr. Neil Butcher, South Africa
- Session on Sharing experience on OER practice and policy in India
  - Presentation by Indira Gandhi National Open University: Prof. Ravindra Kumar, Vice Chancellor
  - National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) Presentation: Prof. Mangala Sunder Krishnan
  - University of Hyderabad Presentation: Prof. J. Prabhakar Rao

Between them, these presentations affirmed the importance of developing a national policy on OER for higher education in India. However, they also cautioned against the danger of developing a national policy that is not implemented, indicating a need to ensure that any policy positions a practical and implementable in the Indian context. It was noted, from international experience and from that of higher education institutions in India, that there are many OER policies that have been developed that have never been operationalized.

Presentations also focused on highlighting some of the key challenges facing higher education in India, noting the importance of ensuring that an OER policy responds directly to these challenges, which can be summarized as the challenges of access, equity, and quality. It was noted that OER can contribute to reducing the costs of curriculum development. However, it was also noted from international experience, especially in the developing world, that there is often a problem that countries are already under-investing in curriculum and materials development, often leading to poor quality content. Simply sharing poor quality content under an open licence will not contribute to meeting the challenges of higher education in India. Consequently, the cost efficiencies in OER can come by eliminating duplication in content development, harnessing and adapting available OER where it already exists (noting the importance of considering the quality of that OER), and encouraging collaboration in curriculum and materials development initiatives in Indian higher education.

Presentations also referenced the importance of considering policy at both national and institutional levels, taking account of the limits of national policy instruments. This implies a need to ensure that a national policy on OER encourages individual institutions to create their own OER policies. Finally, the presentations highlighted various examples of OER in practice, both in India and internationally. It was encouraging to note that there are already good examples of developing and sharing OER in India that might be emulated by others.

Group Discussions

Building on the introductory presentations, participants were divided into five groups to deliberate on key aspects of a national OER policy for higher education in India. Below are brief summaries of the group discussions, focusing on key recommendations presented back to the plenary.

Group 1: Goals, Mission, Vision

Discussion in this group focused on why to engage with OER, considering access, openness and other issues related to OER, with a focus on the Indian Context. The group proposed as, a vision for the policy, 'to make OER a movement to create and increase access, equity and quality of educational resources'. The following goals were identified:
• Empower learners and institutions with resources;
• Cover multiple languages, perspectives, grades and skills;
• Build knowledge and capacities;
• Ensure that standard textbooks are available online;
• Enhance quality of content in local languages ('Think Globally Act Locally');
• Focus on skills;
• Aim at multiple levels of learners;
• Consider, where applicable, use of the same material for multiple skill levels.
The group concluded by asserting that giving open access to institutional material does not affect the value or interest of the institution.

Group 2: Copyrights and Licensing

This group focused on the following key issues:
• There is a need to raise awareness about copyright and licensing issues.
• Institutions should have functional autonomy, accompanied by suitable quality control mechanisms, to release educational content under open licences. There would be value in

developing a rubric to facilitate quality control and ensure that systems are in place to check for plagiarism.

- Content (in all formats) developed by higher education institutions using public funds should be released under appropriate Creative Commons (CC) licensing (using whichever licence is most applicable to the content being released).
- Materials and open courses (including Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs, where these are open) developed in collaboration with other institutions, should be released under CC licensing, with mutual understanding of collaborators
- Courses available on the SWAYAM digital platform should be shared under open licences, following the model established by NPTEL. It is also important to ensure that course materials released under open licences are available to be downloaded off the platform for re-use and adaptation by others.
- Institutions should adopt and follow the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) policy of the Government of India (mutatis mutendis). Software developed by using public funded projects should be released under the conditions of this policy, using appropriate open licences.
- Nodal officers for OER need to be identified in higher education institutions.

In addition, the group noted various challenges:
- There is a lack of awareness among faculty about copyrights and CC licencing.
- No quality criteria have been defined for OER and much content is not free of plagiarism.
- Content developed by publicly funded institutions is often not accessible and/or usable.
- There are no simple mechanisms in place to attach an open licence to collaborative work.
- Institutions are not using FOSS in compliance with national policy on FOSS.
- There are not nodal officers at many institutions to motivate and support faculty in using and sharing OER.

Group 3: Curriculum Development, Teaching and Learning

This group held a participative discussion and brainstorming on possible OER policy positions for curriculum development, teaching and learning. The following key issues were noted:
- All curricula need revision to match needs of the markets.
- Curriculum frameworks are available from the University Grants Commission(UGC), which can be customized by institutions up to 20-30%. These curricula could provide a basis for development of suitable, shared OER for the higher education.
- Uniformity / standardization of curricula for OER should be further elaborated.
- Curricula and educational materials should be multi-cultural, multi-lingual, gender sensitive, etc.
- Innovations in curriculum and educational materials development should be incentivized. Likewise, innovation in teaching and learning practices should be encouraged.
- Curricula should be unitized to promote Credit Accumulation and Credit Transfer, though it is acknowledged that issues is likely outside of the scope of an OER Policy.
- Every Curriculum must be elaborated through proper learning outcomes.
- Employability and life skills should be integrated in all curricula. Again, there is a significant opportunity for creating shared resources (OER) focusing on employability and life skills.
- Pedagogy should promote experiential learning, where appropriate. Likewise, peer assessment, group work, and interactivity should be integrated into the curriculum.
- Quality assurance of OERs and their acceptance by industry / employers are important requirements for success.

Group 4: Capacity Building

This group identified the following issues for consideration:
• Sensitization and awareness of the concepts associated with OER, as well as philosophy and use of OER;
• The need for motivation of individual contributors and institutions;
• Funding constraints;
• Training and faculty development;
• Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure;
• Resistant to change in adapting to a dynamic teaching-learning environment.

In addition, the following challenges were identified:
• Lack of willingness and confidence among contributors;
• Lack of academic leadership at departmental and institutional level;
• Lack of adequate financial resources for capacity building;
• Insufficiency of OER experts to train the large number of stakeholders;
• Insufficiency of adequate teaching and technical staff in higher education institutions;
• Absence of an academic sharing culture among peers.

In response to the above, the following recommendations were made:
• Identify potential institutions as nodal centers for capacity building.
• Identify competent teachers to develop and offer MOOCs, ensuring that these are developed under open licences.
• Provide grants through the UGC to identified institutions for capacity building.
• Run orientation and capacity-building programmes for teachers and technical staff.
• Strengthen ICT infrastructure.
• Provide an incentive structure for institutions and individuals for using and creating OER.
• Establish institutional linkages to facilitate sharing of resources.

Group 5: Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Quality Assurance

This group considered the following key issues:
• Availability of adequate software/hardware infrastructure;
• Maintenance and sustainable model for updates and upgrading of software and hardware;
• Necessary/adequate funding.

It noted the following challenges to be considered in developing an OER policy:
• Assuring quality;
• Minimizing duplication;
• Assuring 24/7 connectivity and ICT access;
• Providing editable/reusable content;
• Aligning OERs with academic curricula;
• Securing adequate user responses/feedback to evaluate OERs;
• Creating an assessment/evaluation focused on OER.

In response to this, the group made the following recommendations:
1) Infrastructure and Connectivity:
    a) Provide cloud software to host OER platforms and enable access by contributing institutions, with appropriate content delivery networks (CDNs) to be created within the cloud.
    b) Use open software to achieve the above and, wherever possible, for content development, as this allows source codes to be made available.

c) Assure editing and repurposing of content through use of open formats.
d) Ensure that OERs are platform independent, so they are accessible via all browsers.
e) Provide adequate connectivity for institutions, with a minimum recommended capacity of 1gbps and a per-user speed of 0.5 mbps to 1mbps.
f) Provide software for content development as part of institutional ICT infrastructure, using bulk/enterprise licences to enable access to professional software, when required.
g) Ensure that content created is 'mobile-friendly', including possible development of mobile apps where appropriate.
2) Quality Assurance:
a) Institute checks on plagiarism in OER at all levels.
b) Develop and implement standardized mechanisms for evaluating OER between different institutions.
c) Implement some form of review of OERs from institutions before they are included in a national OER repository. Where high-quality video resources are included, the streaming (audio/video) capability of the streaming server should also be checked before these are added to any library/repository.
d) Ensure searchability of all content records in institutional and national OER repositories. This should include ensuring that existing OERs can be harvested by other repositories and all repositories are made 'Open Access Initiative Protocol Metadata Harvesting' (OAI/PMH) compliant.
e) Conduct independent reviews of OER quality.

The group noted that adequate funding would need to be provided for all above initiatives by the MHRD.

Emerging Policy Considerations

In the concluding session of the workshop and the subsequent Advisory Cum Consultative Committee meeting that took place immediately after the workshop, the following emerging policy considerations were discussed and agreed:

1) The draft policy should commence with a section providing conceptual clarity on key terms. It was proposed that the definition of OER presented in the Paris OER Declaration be used as a definition for this policy, as it serves to clarify several important points, including the following:
a) OER is not restricted to digital content only, and incorporates printed materials;
b) OER is not synonymous with e-learning and/or distance education, and is equally applicable across all modes of educational delivery;
c) A key attribute of OERs is the ability to re-use and re-mix resources, so MOOCs should not be automatically considered to be OERs, because many MOOCs do not permit re-use and re-mixing.
As part of the definitions, it was also agreed that distinction needs to be made between OERs and open access, so that it is clear that the policy does not seek to govern research outputs of higher education institutions.

2) It was agreed that the policy needs to be kept simple and realistic, to maximize the likelihood of operationalization. Given this, the workshop, while noting the many excellent contributions throughout the day, agreed that careful consideration should be given to what recommendations can realistically be included in a national policy. The workshop agreed that the draft policy should be get crisp and brief.

3) Agreement was reached on the need for distinct policy instruments at the national and institutional levels. Given this, it was agreed that the policy should make provision for, and strongly encourage, the development of equivalent OER Policies at the institutional level.

4) The workshop proposed that the draft policy should be underpinned by a strong social vision statement that answers the key policy question: 'Why OER?' It was suggested that this vision statement could be derived from the workshop presentations and group discussion summaries.

5) There was general agreement that the policy should recommend the use of a specific open licensing framework across Indian higher education, with the Creative Commons licensing framework proposed as a suitable one for inclusion in the policy. This should be accompanied by guidance on when and under what circumstances to apply different specific CC licences.

6) Given the realities of the Indian higher education system, the workshop agreed that application of open licences to educational content, as a general principle, should be kept voluntary. However, the workshop also agreed that any educational materials developed through government funds (for example, grants from the UGC) should be released under an open licence. Where content is developed using government funds, it will, by default, be openly licensed, under a CC-BY licence. While making this a requirement, space should also be provided for institutions to request that content developed using government funds should be released under an alternative CC licences or even retain an all-rights reserved copyright status if the institution believes there is meaningful potential to commercialize that content. However, Any such exceptions would need to be agreed in writing with the relevant government funding agency and could not be applied retrospectively.

7) The workshop agreed that the draft OER policy should endorse the importance of providing higher education institutions sufficient connectivity and ICT infrastructure to enable effective OER use and participation by both academics and students in global knowledge networks online.

8) It was agreed that the policy needs to pay close attention to ensuring the quality of OERs, using various of the mechanisms proposed in group discussion summaries. However, it was also noted that it is unrealistic to expect the creation of a dedicated national agency or capacity to review OERs for quality. Thus, this issue needs to receive coverage in equivalent institutional policies and be embedded in institutional quality assurance systems and processes.

9) The workshop agreed on various priorities for further development of OERs:
   a) Collaborative development of OERs in key areas of national need (for example, life skills, academic orientation, key UGC curricula, etc);
   b) Development/translation of OER in vernacular languages;
   c) OERs that support the introduction of pedagogical innovations;
   d) Development of OERs through institutional consortia.

10) It was agreed that there is a strong need for awareness-raising and capacity-building around OER, but noted the limitations of a national policy in operationalizing this. Thus, a key mechanism for capacity-building might be through the development of parallel institutional policies, as proposed above. However, the workshop did agree that there is a need to identify, at national level, some kind of incentive to encourage institutions and academics to engage with OER. One proposal to achieve this might be the inclusion of OER in the academic performance indicators (APIs), with use/development/adaptation of OER being recognized for API credits.

11) Although the issue of integrating credits gained through vehicles such as MOOCs was noted as an important policy issue, the workshop agreed that the issue of credits and recognition of alternative forms of educational delivery is beyond the scope of an OER policy.

12) It was suggested that, if possible, the policy might include – as an Appendix – an OER Maturity Index to guide institutions on how to make systematic, phased progress in harnessing OERs.

Appendix One: Workshop Agenda

Schedule of the National Consultation on OER for Higher Education

Date: 3rd March, 2017

Venue: Hotel Oodles, 759-762, Main Road, Chattarpur, New Delhi

Time	Activity
9:30-10:00	**Registration**
10:00-11:00	**Opening Session** Welcome of the guests and Introduction of the National Consultation: **Dr. Shahid Rasool,** Director CEMCA Keynote Address: **Prof. V.S. Prasad**, Former Director, NAAC. Remarks by the **Chief Guest / Guest of Honour** Presidential Address: **Prof. Nageshwar Rao**, VC, Uttarakhand Open University Vote of Thanks: **Dr. Manas Ranjan Panigrahi**, CEMCA, New Delhi
11:00-11:30	**Tea/Coffee Break**
11:30-12:30	**Open Educational Resources: Policy and Practices** (International) Chair: Prof. Nageshwar Rao, VC, Uttarakhand Open University Rapporteur: Ms. Sujata Santosh, IGNOU OER Policy Development and International Practices by: **Mr. Neil Butcher**, South Africa (30 minutes) Discussion: All Participants
12:30-13:30	**Experience sharing on OER practice and policy in India** Chair: Prof. V.S. Prasad, Former Director, NAAC Rapporteur: Dr. G. Mythili, IGNOU Presentation by IGNOU : **Prof. Ravindra Kumar,** VC (15 Minutes) NPTEL Presentation : **Prof. Mangala Sunder Krishnan** (15 Minutes) UOH Presentation : **Prof. J. Prabhakar Rao** (15 Minutes) Discussion : All Participants
13:30-14:30	**Lunch Break**

Time	Activity
14:30- 16:30	**Group Work** **Group 1: Goals, Mission, Vision** Moderator: Prof. T.V. Prabhakar, IIT Kanpur Rapporteur: Ms. Sujata Santosh, IGNOU **Group 2: Copyrights and Licencing** Moderator: Prof. Subha Sankar Sarkar, VC, NSOU Rapporteur: Dr. G. Mythili, IGNOU **Group 3: Curriculum Development, Teaching and Learning** Moderator: Prof. Madhu Parhar, IGNOU Rapporteur: Ms. Sanjogita Mishra, CEMCA **Group 4: Capacity Building** Moderator: Prof. V. Venkaiah, Former VC, Krishna University Rapporteur: Prof. Pradeep Kumar Misra, CCS University
	Group 5: Infrastructure, Connectivity and Quality Assurance Moderator: Prof. Mangala Sunder Krishnan, IIT, Madras Rapporteur: Ms. Ishita Pradhan, CEMCA *Each group to discuss issues and challenges and present solutions/ recommendations considered for policy development. Each group will have a moderator, and a rapporteur. Group work: 1hr.; Presentations: 30 Minutes Discussion: 30 minutes.*

16:30-17:00	**Concluding Session**
	    Major recommendations by **Mr. Neil Butcher**, South Africa
	    Closing Remarks by **Prof. Nageshwar Rao**, VC, Uttarakhand Open University
	    Vote of Thanks by **Dr. Shahid Rasool**, Director CEMCA

17:00-17:30	**High Tea**

Appendix Two: Workshop Participants

National Consultation on OER Policy for Higher Education in India
03.03.2017
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Appendix Three: A Few Reflections on OER Policy Framework
Prof. V. S. Prasad

- **Policy is essential**
  System based and policy based responses are necessary to address the phenomenal changes that are taking place in the world of education. Open Educational Resources (OER) as 'public good' needs a public policy to support, facilitate and regulate its development and use. Policy - a series of steps to be taken to achieve the goal-provides a legitimate basis for action and helps in taking integrated view and actions to realise the full potential of OER.

- **OER policy to address the challenges of education**
  Access, equity and quality are the major concerns of higher education in India. The ways and means of addressing these concerns by OER should form an important component of OER policy. Many international studies have indicated that reducing the costs of curriculum development and improving the quality of teaching and learning are the two major concerns in the use of ODL (G.Dhanarajan (Ed.) 2016, OER: Vignettes of Selected Asian Experiences). The vision, mission and scope of OER policy should bring conceptual clarity on OER and many other types of open movements like open practices, open infrastructure, open culture and similar others.

- **OER policy at national and institutional levels**
  Individuals, institutions and education system are the reference units of national OER policy. The inclusive national policy may take note of multiple uses and forms of OER. The use of OER in formal and non-formal systems have to be integrated in the national OER policy. The diversity and complexity are the important features of higher education in India. The institutions are in different stages of development. They may have to be encouraged to develop institutional OER policies appropriate to their context. It may be desirable to develop OER maturity matrix of three stages i.e., low, medium and high and the institutions may be encouraged to move from one level to other (like in Open Educational Quality Initiative, OPAL, www.oer-quality.org). The national OER policy may provide a framework for development of institutional OER policies.

- **Rational approach to OER policy**
  Effective and efficient ways of achieving goals is a rational approach. Public policy making should move from 'arrangement focused' approach to 'realisation focused' approach. The arrangement focused view is more abstract and general in contrast to realisation focused view which is more operational and specific.

- **Dynamic Policy**
  The policy should include the process of policy review and provisions for incorporation of necessary policy changes as responses to changes in context.

- **Learning from experiences and addressing apprehensions**
  The Indian experiences in OER practices deserve critical reflection to get inputs for policy. Contradictions in the education context like knowledge in public domain for free use and management of education in private domain; OER without open educational practices; practices of recognition of individual excellence; competition among public institutions for scares resources may be taken note in policy formulation of OER. The policy as an action guide will have relevance only if it can provide a broad way forward in the use, development and regulation of OER, in this complex higher education scenario.