INTEGRATING OER IN UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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One of the burning issues most higher education institutions in Ukraine is currently addressing is a steady decrease in the number of applicants. This results in a considerable reduction in the university staff, faculties and even disappearance of entire universities. The present destructive situation Ukrainian higher education finds itself in is often reported to be rooted in the Soviet higher education with its poor foreign language skills demonstrated by most university graduates and the absence of culture of academic freedom [3, p. 77]. Although Soviet legacy has had its negative effect on our Ukrainian higher education, the latter is not devoid of its own 'landmines'.

Some of the current challenges which could be attributed to the contemporary system of Ukrainian higher education are the inability of new Ukrainian higher education to respond to the 21st century students' needs and demands and failure to see students as digital citizens. One of the possible causes is that most Ukrainian universities have never set investing money into facilities and resources for teaching, research, administration and student life as their priority. However, this along with highly qualified faculty, excellence in research and quality teaching is regarded as a basic feature of a world-class university most Ukrainian universities are striving to become [5, p. 8].

In this situation responding to a globally dominant trend of openness in higher education may prove to be a good solution [1]. The introduction of elements of open education practices that involve distance learning, OER and MOOCs may provide the necessary tools for universities to meet the external threats. Adopting them and learning to use them to their own advantage will 'most probably secure a prosperous and glorious future' for our universities [6, p. 208].

The purpose of this study is to conduct preliminary research into the benefits OER may bring into Ukrainian higher education and the role higher education stakeholders may have in the process of integration OER in higher education.

Following Butcher and Moore, the present paper, defines OER as 'those teaching and learning materials that are available either in the public domain or under an open license' [2, p. 8]. In contrast to traditional resources, they "allow for more flexibility in the use, reuse and adaptation of materials for local contexts and learning environments, while allowing authors to have their work acknowledged" [4, p. 2].

There is a substantial body of research that suggests that OER possess the transformative potential for higher education institutions. The transformative potential of OER, first of all, includes their significant contribution to raising standards of teaching and learning by influencing the development and improvement of curricula, high quality teaching and learning materials, ongoing programs and course designs. Moreover, the transformative potential of OER promotes collaboration among higher education institutions within a single country and on the international level.

However, the role OER may have in transforming higher education depends on a number of procedures that involve all the higher education stakeholders: the government, higher education institutions themselves, academic staff, student bodies, quality assurance bodies, etc.

According to the *Guidelines for Open Educational Resources in Higher Education,* the government can contribute to the integration of OER in higher education through their policy-making role by adopting open licencing frameworks and open standards, raising awareness of key OER issues and encouraging sharing of high quality learning and teaching materials [4, p. 6]. It is further suggested that higher education institutions should establish institutional strategies for the integration of OER. In this context, their primary task is to create motivational incentives for the academic staff to adapt the available OER and develop their own high quality OER. This involves establishing flexible copyright policies and policies relating to storing and accessing OER.

As far as academic staff are concerned, they are regarded as vital agents who are responsible for the quality of teaching and learning materials. However, being able to ensure the quality of OER means the development of a number of new skills such as

skills to evaluate the available OER, to assemble, adapt and contextualise them, to work in teams and develop teaching and learning materials. It should also be noted that the OER quality assurance heavily depends on the students themselves who can provide constructive feedback on OER. Hence, one of the important task for the academic staff is to provide opportunities for student participation in the process of EOR integration.

Hence, the integration of OER in Ukrainian higher education is seen as one of the solutions for higher education institutions to ensure their high quality teaching and transform higher education at large. The process of OER integration involves the participation of all the higher education stakeholders.

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