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Open Educational Resources (OER) movement should start in Bangladesh

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Contemporary technologies have revolutionized many aspects of higher education in 21st century. Youths are called tech-savvy because of the availability of modern technology. However, are universities in Bangladesh aware about it? Are they fulfill the needs of tech-savvy students? According to Wikipedia, Educational technology is "the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources". To progress teaching and learning environment in higher education, educational resources need to open.

The term open educational resource (OER) is the results of a spring 2002 meeting held at UNESCO, and organized with support of WCET and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Wiley 2006). UNESCO defined "Open Educational Resources (OERs) are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them. OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation." Commonwealth of Learning (COL) stated OER "Materials offered freely and openly to use and adapt for teaching, learning, development and research"

OER can include full courses/programmes, course materials, modules, student guides, teaching notes, textbooks, research articles, videos, assessment tools and instruments, interactive materials, databases, software, apps and any other educationally useful materials. It should be mentioned here that OER is not synonymous with online learning, eLearning or mobile learning. However, OER as a term is largely synonymous with open courseware (OCW) which is course lessons created at universities and published for free via the Internet. OCW projects first appeared in the late 1990sin Europe and then the United States have become a worldwide means of delivering educational content.OERs help improve education across the globe especially for developing countries, where many students may not be able to afford textbooks, where access to classrooms may be limited, and where teacher-training programs may be lacking.

According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in 2017, Bangladesh has youth literacy rate (15-24) of 92.95%. Due to lack of proper infrastructure, limited access to relevant educational resources and other reasons, many students are unable to gain higher education for their future life. However, information and communications technology (ICT) sector in Bangladesh has been progressing gradually and we are already enjoying the outcomes of this sector such as most students in higher education are using smartphone and they are practicing to use mobile for education purposes. In this situation, we should consider the applications of OER in higher education. Government has taken a series of initiatives to promote Information Communication Technology (ICT) in higher education in Bangladesh. Here, we can mention about Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN) under HEQEP with assistance from World Bank. BdREN is a high performance data Communications network providing connectivity among education and research institutions in both public and private sectors.

Bangladesh has now 41 public and 103 private universities. Among these universities, only Bangladesh Open University (BOU) association with Access to Information (a2i) Programme, and Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada have organized a National Consultation Workshop of Policy for Open Educational Resources (OER) on 19th November 2016. The objectives of this workshop were to engage with relevant stakeholders to discuss the need of OER; discuss the draft OER policy; and discuss a strategy for adoption and implementation of OER policy for Bangladesh. Later on, in July 2018, Secondary and Higher Education Division of Ministry of Education has developed a draft policy and requested public opinion in order to finalize the draft policy. This can undoubtedly be called a great step which will be an effective impact for higher education. However, in order to improve access to learning materials and releasing them in digital format under an open license, preferably the most current version of Creative Commons Attribution licenses, academicians should know the clear concept about open license. We all are known that National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has released full text books for grades 1-12 in 2011 and this initiative is one of the steps for the commencement of OER movement in Bangladesh. Open textbooks are one form of OER. An open textbook is “a textbook licensed under an open copyright license and made available online to be freely used by students, teachers, and members of the public” (Wikipedia, 2018). As textbook is the main ingredient of course delivery. Now-a-days, many prominent worldwide universities have been providing open textbooks for their students such as College Open Textbooks. This effort funded by the Hewlett Foundation, seeks to drive adoption of open textbooks, Open Textbook Library which has hundreds of complete, open college-level textbooks collected by the University of Minnesota, BC OpenEd, Wikibooks, Google Books and so on.

Open Access (OA) had also grown rapidly along with OER. The Budapest Open Access Initiative in 2002 first defined Open Access which refers to scholarly publications released under an open (e.g., Creative Commons) license, including in open access journals. Faculty members and students from many private universities in Bangladesh are aware of open access movement such as East West University, BRAC University, North South University, American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) and so on. It should be stated here that East West University is the forerunner university to raise awareness on this issue among university community. As the subscription of scientific journals are increasing day by day and it is difficult for universities to afford the high rate of subscription. Therefore, the open access content needs to develop as well as practice by academics in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Journals OnLine (BanglaJOL) is a database of journals published in Bangladesh, covering the full range of academic disciplines and currently it has 142 journals. It was initiated in June 2007 and officially launched in September 2007. It is a project supported by INASP. In 2014, the management of BanglaJOL moved to the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS). It aims to promote the awareness and use of Bangladesh-published journals in all disciplines by providing access to tables of contents (TOCs), abstracts and full text on the Internet. In addition, among 122 OA repositories of Southern Asia, Bangladesh has only 12 OA repositories been listed in the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR). Academics should have proper knowledge on the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) as well as the Directory of Open Access Scholarly Resources (ROAD).

The current Government of Bangladesh has been actively working on the progression of ICT application in higher education. National policy or funding mandate regarding OA should necessitates for creating awareness and practices in higher education. Universities of Bangladesh should deliberate about joining with the Open Education Consortium (OEC). OEC is a non-profit, global, members-based network of open education institutions and organizations to develop open policy, share OERs and engage with international collaboration and innovation.

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has already started to practice OER and now other public as well as private universities need to be conscious about OER and transformed digital learning and teaching environments from traditional environments.

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