

2017: An Odyssey in the open education space. Developing and using OER in TVET

Virtual conference on the UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Forum from 9 to 18 November 2017
Moderated by Robert Schuwer & Ben Janssen

Introduction

The topic of 'OER' (Open Educational Resources) is fairly new for TVET. Recently, OER for TVET specifically has been included in the Action Plan of the World OER Congress. OER have the potential of making TVET more accessible and equitable.

OER for TVET is the subject of a current UNESCO-UNEVOC project involving an international literature review, a survey amongst members of the UNEVOC-TVET forum, and interviews with international experts. A first draft has been published in September. Results have been presented at the 2nd World OER Congress. A final report will be published in December 2017.

The purpose of the virtual conference is to share information, experience and knowledge of OER in TVET, which will be used as input for the final report as well as into wider UNESCO practices.

This note sets out the issues to be dealt with in the virtual conference and gives some background based on the current UNESCO-UNEVOC project.

Topics in the virtual conference

Importance of 'Openness'

According to UNESCO Open Educational resources (OER) are "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work." (UNESCO, 2012).

Creative Commons (CC) licenses have become the most widely used license model for OER. Creative Commons licenses provide a legal framework for the free sharing, adaptation, re-use and retaining of educational resources.

The current research project has shown that OER nor 'openness' are an issue yet for TVET. Various forms of free available resources are being used in TVET. Teachers, trainers and learners in TVET have a much broader view of what open educational resources are than the UNESCO definition. For many learners, free access to whatever resources are available is important, not the rights to adapt, to reuse or to retain. For this reason, Youtube is a much used medium in TVET, as well as free available MOOCs

(Massive Open Online Courses). For teachers and trainers, however, open licensing is important. In many cases learning resources need to be repurposed to fit into the context of use. OER make this possible.

Teachers and Trainers

A much researched topic around OER is: what do teachers, trainers, faculty and students think about, and feel toward OER? What are the factors that impede or speed up the adoption of OER by teachers and trainers? In the current UNESCO-UNEVOC study it is observed that teachers and trainers play a crucial role in the uptake of OER in TVET. Whether or not teachers and trainers in TVET adopt OER is dependent on the interplay of different factors. Some of these factors are within the realm of teachers' personal control while others are less so, or are out of their control entirely: is there enough (technical) infrastructure access, who has the legal permission, what about the intellectual awareness and technical capacity of teachers and trainers, how much educational resources are available, in which languages, and what are the motives, attitudes, perceptions and practices of individuals and institutions? The interplay of all these factors determines the uptake of OER, also in TVET.

Learning from good practices

From the literature reviewed the projects or programs INVEST Africa and VUSSC (Virtual University of the Smaller States of the Commonwealth) come to the fore as the most lasting and comprehensive projects in the field of OER for TVET. An important actor in both projects is the Commonwealth of Learning. The projects OER Africa and TESSA are also worth mentioning.

INVEST Africa is aimed at capacity building on the premise that flexible and blended learning and teaching approaches can impact positively on the goals of TVET institutions to expand access to quality vocational education and skills development, especially for informal sector skills training; and that it can support the inclusion of girls and women and promote gender equity.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a network university through which small countries committed to the collaborative development, adaptation and sharing of OER. The VUSSC is a mechanism for small countries to collaboratively develop, adapt and share courses and learning materials. It is also a forum for institutions to build capacity and expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and information and communication technologies (ICT) in general.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an active partner in both projects and programs and as such an important actor in the field of OER in TVET.

Collaboration and cooperation with government and private sector

There is a great need for TVET to respond adequately to the challenges of knowledge economies. One of the ways to do this is that private sector and industries engage in the production of resources for skills development and in the actual skills development itself. Involvement of the private sector in OER for TVET, however, is very rare. This might have to do with a lack of awareness of the potentialities of OER for TVET. This holds also for governments. OER do not yet play a role in many national TVET policies. Partly this has to do with the predominant focus in TVET on practicing skills and learning by doing, especially for the ISCED levels 2 and 3. Perhaps it even holds for ISCED level 4. Furthermore, at least in the global North, for a large part TVET takes place within the realms of private companies.

Within these contexts, learning materials are not an important issue, let alone the specific characteristics of openness of learning resources.

Collaboration between institutions and between institutions and industry can make the development of OER more economical, drawing on an extensive range of knowledge, skills and experience and help to ensure the credibility of the training materials.

What do you expect from UNESCO-UNEVOC when introducing OER in TVET?

In the current research project it was emphasized that there is great need for international cooperation in order to learn from experiences, but also to use each other's resources. More specifically UNESCO (-UNEVOC) tasks would be:

- Foster awareness raising at policy level.
- Promote understanding and use of open licensing frameworks for educational, learning and training resources in TVET.
- Encourage practices of development and adaption of OER in TVET, in different cultural contexts.
- Expand these activities by collecting good practices and, based on these good practices, formulate guidelines on how to come to policy formulation with regard to OER for TVET.
- Develop policy formulation models and frameworks that governments and institutions can use, modify and apply.
- Provide support on developing guidelines to customizing to local/national context.
- Provide support on systems for quality assurance of OER in TVET and for harmonizing existing quality systems.

About the moderators

Robert Schuwer is Professor Open Educational Resources (OER) at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, School of ICT in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. In September 2016 he was appointed Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on OER at Fontys. Since 2006 the majority of his work is about OER and Open Education. Among other activities, he was project leader in the Dutch national program Wikiwijs, aiming at enhancing awareness on OER and creating a national infrastructure for OER, initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Education. His current research is on adoption of OER and other forms of open online education by the early and late majority of teachers. He is chairman of the SURF Dutch Special Interest Group Open Education.

Ben Janssen works as an independent researcher and advisor in the fields of open education, open educational resources, business strategy, and professional and vocational education and training. Ben has been working for over twenty years in education with a consistent focus on the development of innovative forms of higher and vocational education. In addition to his extensive experience in teaching at university level and TVET, he has worked as researcher and consultant in the field of supply chain management (logistics), infrastructure and transportation.