

Educational institutions need to become a producer of content and not just consumer of content: **Sanjaya Mishra**

[Sanjaya Mishra](#) is one of the leading scholars in open, distance and online learning domains. He is an Education Specialist at Commonwealth of Learning ([COL](#)) in Canada. He has served Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia ([CEMCA](#)), [UNESCO](#), Paris and IGNOU's Regional Centres in prominent capacities.



He is promoting the use of educational multimedia, eLearning, open educational resources (OER) and open access to scientific information around the world. During his service at the IGNOU, he developed the OER-based one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in eLearning. He has facilitated over 1000 hours of training in distance education, information and communication technologies, educational multimedia, eLearning and OER in over 30 countries.

Mishra has won many awards for his outstanding contribution in the field of open access to scholarly information including Prof. G Ram Reddy Social Scientist Award in 2013 for his yeoman contribution to the distance education and OER.

In this interview for [Open Interview](#) with [Santosh C. Hulagabali](#), Mishra shares his practical experiences and ideas on the issues and opportunities concerning the OER and allied concepts. He is of the strong view that the usability of OER can accelerate only when more educators are aware of the real utilities of the OER and the policies to support creation and use of OER. Being a highly proactive professional globally in the training, publication and research on OER, e-learning, distance education, etc. he calls for more focused approach to understand, adapt and use OER for the larger benefit of the scholarly communication.

• **What are the global trends in open educational resources (OER)?**

Access to educational materials is a huge problem anywhere in the world. It is a big problem in both high and low-income countries. Students in the U.S.A. spend about \$ 1200 per year on textbooks. Due to heavy costs many prefer not to buy text-books which often impacts their learning. It is similar in the countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia and others. The OER movement has emerged to reduce this challenge. As per the [Global OER Report 2017](#), there is an increased governmental support for OER in comparison to previous study in 2012. Over 40 countries reported some kind of policy support for OER, and there were over 100 OER repositories around the world. The most significant trend today is the adoption of

[Recommendation on OER](#) in November 2019 by the General Conference of UNESCO. It may be noted that as per the UNESCO recommendation, it is now up to the Member States to take whatever legislative or other steps may be required to make educational resources available with an open license.

- **OER concept is quite around for many years and yet OER movement is in its infancy in some countries? What is your view on this?**

The term OER was created in an expert meeting at UNESCO in 2002. At that time, the idea was to recognize knowledge as a social product and the experts agreed to “develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity”. Looking back, the progress is not that unsatisfactory. There is an increased awareness about OER in many countries. There are Zero Textbook Cost programmes available in Canada and USA. India has a huge amount of world’s OER through its [National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning](#) and INFLIBNET’s [e-PGPathshala](#).

- **The awareness of OER among the educators is mostly limited to their usage than creation. What is your take on this hypothesis?**

Yes, this is a major concern. While use is the first positive step, educators need to spend time and energy to create new OER or adapt existing OER to improve their quality. The current lack of OER creation is due to two primary reasons: first, there is a lack of institutional OER policy to guide educators, and second, the skills to curate and create OER are also low, particularly the knowledge of copyrights and open licensing.

- **Coming to policy, in the OER ecosystem how significant the ‘OER policy’ is? Have we really focused on policy aspects in a way it is required?**

As I said before, policy is key to adoption of OER. We need to know clearly why it is important to adopt policy both at national and institutional levels. Government bodies spend huge amount of resources in creating educational materials. It is important that such materials are available with an open license so that these are used, reused, revised and remixed by anyone in any educational institution to teach and learn. Educational institutions also need to become a producer of content and not just consumer of content, and therefore institutional policies are needed. If governments are able to take appropriate steps to adopt UNESCO OER Recommendation then the situation will surely improve further.

- **Many academic intuitions are creating e-content and sharing widely than ever before but this whole production is not mediated or directed by their OER policies as policies are not given due importance. What would be the impact if it is not policy driven?**

There are OER champions in many educational institutions. In the absence of policy, these champions struggle to promote the idea and benefits that students, teachers and educational institutions may get through the use of OER. It is well known that lack of policy promotes ad-hoc decision-making, which does not promote sustainability of any initiative.

- **Yes, we understood the ‘how and why’ factors of OER policy but there seems some utter confusion when it comes to framing OER policy. We often do not understand ‘when’ to frame OER policy? It would be good if you let us know ‘when’ and ‘how’ OER policy should be framed.**

There is no recipe for OER policy. But certainly there are two normal ways of OER policy formulation. One, where practice follows policy, and the other where policy drives practice. While I always prefer ‘policy first’ approach, there is no evidence about one is better than the other. So the question of ‘when’ is more about contexts. While the question of ‘how’ is much important and therefore I would recommend those interested in OER policy development to follow the [UNESCO-COL Guidelines on the Development of Open Educational Resources Policies](#).

- **What developments do you notice in OER policies in Indian higher educational institutes and research institutes?**

The uptake of OER policy in Indian higher education institution is low. There are only a small number of institutions, which has adopted OER policy. Even in those institutions that have adopted OER policy, the implementation of the policy is questionable. However, a good example is a relatively new university – [Odisha State Open University](#), which has a policy and released its learning resources as OER.

- **There is an unequal distribution of ‘national OER policies’. Even some developed countries do not have one. One of the UNESCO studies ([Link](#)) reveals that “In Tunisia, Tanzania, Slovenia, South Africa, the UK, Germany, and Chile, there is no specific OER policy”. What could be the possible reasons?**

It is important to also recognize that in the absence of a national policy, governments to several activities to support OER. For example, in South Africa a national “White Paper for Post-school Education and Training” includes OER as the way to expand post-secondary education. So, policy support may come in different forms. However, policies are also subjected change due to change of government, and therefore it may be a better idea to consider legislative route to policies, which makes little difficult to change the law. Nevertheless, the biggest reason for lack of policy is public participation and demand for such provisions.

- **How far- are we successful in reusing OER as they are far more meant for reusing than just using?**

The difference between use and reuse is very thin. Primarily, use is about ‘as is’ usage and ‘reuse’ is using several times or in different contexts. What we see limited is ‘revise’ and ‘re-mix’ of OER as these require additional skills.

- **OER financing and sustainability are two important aspects. How do you see these two elements and what are the ways to strengthen the both?**

If we consider OER is a public good then the issue of financing and sustainability is of little significance. However, someone has to pay to develop OER and distribute it. Governmental support and philanthropic support have been the major sources of financing OER. When public funded institutions consider this as part of their mandate to share educational resources to public, the issue of sustainability becomes quite easy. Even when institutions have funding challenges, making their knowledge resources more accessible increases their visibility and thereby improves the possibility of increased funding. For a more detailed discussion of OER sustainability, I recommend readers to read my blog on "[Is 'service' the new secret of OER sustainability?](#)"

- **The OER are predominantly developed in English and the share of indigenous languages is minimal as compared to the former. How to set this imbalance to reach out to the locals or is it a distant dream to achieve (in the Indian, Chinese or French context)?**

This is a very important question and should be looked in a broader context of the Internet. English is still the predominant language of the Internet, though the situation is changing fast. As for non-English language OER, it requires policy support. There are huge OER initiatives in [China](#), [France](#) and [Vietnam](#). [African Storybook](#) is an interesting project that is promoting OER in African language. In India [Storyweaver](#), promoted by Pratham Books, is a platform provides open-licensed children's stories in over 250 languages. Talking about language, I would like to highlight that the Odisha government has [released 21 dictionaries](#) in indigenous languages with [Creative Commons license](#) making these OER.

- **Reviewing or quality checking of OER is utmost important. What are your general observations on 'review practices' for quality sustenance of OER?**

Quality is a topic that is of concern to all stakeholders in education, particularly, educators. When it comes to quality of OER, the question is often asked, considering anyone can release any material online with an open license. However, when educational institutions release OER, they ensure quality through their own internal quality assurance process. There are several guidelines on how to ensure OER quality. In 2014, I was involved in developing [quality assurance guidelines for OER](#), which has several criteria that the OER creators should consider while developing OER. These can also be applied in repositories to help users rate the resources.

- **Any OER related issues concerned with publishers and copyright aspects?**

Many times, publishers are concerned about OER due to lack of understanding or vested interests. However, the situation is changing as there are many publishers that have started using OER to strengthen their business models. It is important to note that the author retains the copyright and transfers the copyright to the publisher. So, it is the responsibility of the authors as to how they want their work should be distributed.

- **What will be the future of OER? What trend do you foresee of their development or improvisation, etc.?**

The future of OER is very clear and straight forward. Given the right support, as envisaged in the UNESCO OER Recommendation, we can have accessible learning content at all levels and in all languages supporting everyone to learn, irrespective of wherever they live. Moving forward, it is important to focus on [accessible OER](#) development, and OER repositories and [connecting the repositories](#) for easy retrieval of materials, with an overarching equity lens.

- **What role library professionals can play in the OER arena?**

Library professionals play an active role in promoting the use of OER as they can curate and manage the educational resources well for use. Therefore, it is important to train library professionals to understand about OER. The [Commonwealth of Learning](#) has a short course on ‘[Understanding OER](#)’ that can be completed by anyone by spending about 2 hours of time. A group of librarians in the USA has contextualized Prof. S.R. Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science as “[Five Laws of OER](#)”, which summarizes the role library and information professionals could play in promoting the OER movement. I encourage every library professional to become a champion of OER in his/her organization.



Note • All the answers/ opinions expressed in this document are of the interviewee.



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