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Teacher's Time is Valuable¹

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Abstract

Consistent adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) depends on a number of factors. These may correspond to business, legal, policy, academic or technology issues. Among the vast number of elements making deployment harder, one is often underestimated: an increase on the demand for teacher's time. Some solutions to motivate and/or gratify teachers that adopt OER have been proposed over the years and used successfully among the first adopters. Unfortunately, such solutions are not always possible in several contexts. In this paper, we propose that a key concern of research on OER technologies should focus on saving teacher's time when creating pedagogical resources.

Keywords

OER adoption, teachers' time, technology, pedagogy, workload

1. Introduction

When deploying Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives it is often the case that the project stalls because of having failed to foresee that the excellent teacher, whose work the OER is supposed to be based upon, does not have the time nor the energy to brush² her slides, to re-engineer her course, to add the meta-data, to make herself available to answer the forum or prepare the additional material without which the courseware is not what the promoters were expecting.

A number of studies have already pointed out that the lack of teacher's involvement is an important (if not the single most important) issue to start the adoption of OER. In certain contexts, the institution uses an incentive-based model in order to encourage the teachers to accept the extra workload. In under-resourced systems, or in places where newcomers to these questions are failing to understand the different issues, this may not be possible. In this work, we analyse the problem, the proposed alternatives and argue in favour of deploying technology in a way that enhances the learning (and teaching) experience, whilst avoiding burdening the teacher with a heavier workload.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. A List of Issues for OER

Projects regarding the adoption of OER face a number of issues related to its attributes and decision points as described in the framework proposed by Stacey & Rominger (2006). The issues are grouped under the following categories: business, legal, policy, academic, technology.

Moreover, in many countries the law has more or less broad definitions of fair use and

1 This work has received a French government support granted to the COMIN Labs excellence laboratory and managed by the National Research Agency in the "Investing for the Futures" program ANR-JO-LABX-07-0J.
2 Brushing the slides consists in making them free of any material inconsistent with the chosen licence.

educational use. Such a circumstance often means that teachers are used to incorporate in their pedagogical resources some materials of which they are not authors, but that they believe they can use if in a pedagogical environment. Nonetheless, when creating/adapting this material to be published as OER, this “exception” no longer applies and they face the need to brush the material³.

Frequently, some of these key attributes (or the combination of them) may end up being more time consuming than expected, especially regarding teacher’s time.

It was also noted that the question of effort is a crucial one when the teacher’s perception of OER production was surveyed: teachers do not perceive OER as a means to save time (Masterman, Wild, White, & Manton, 2011, p. 138).

2.2. About Teacher’s Time

Therefore, the issues related to the adoption of OER and the fact of having her work made public will have consequences regarding the work of the teacher:

- She will receive extra pressure because her material is going to be made public - perhaps due to the fact that her course is going to be filmed;
- The teacher is expected to help render her material impeccable. In some cases she will be asked to sign agreements she does not really understand (copyright, image forms);
- The teacher may be asked to enrich her contents, by providing additional texts, updating her lectures, adding a forum, some quizzes and exams, in order to better adapt the material to a larger public.

The above has also been noted by several authors, including in the work by Masterman et al. (2011) already mentioned. In fact, “time” is mentioned as the most significant barrier for not adopting OER by two thirds of the respondents of an OECD questionnaire (Hylén, 2005, p. 4).

2.3. Why Is This Not Always Taken into Account?

We can conclude that the process of adopting OER is not easy, automatic or effortless. Still, why is it usually seen as so?

Possibly, the common confusion between free and open has a role in this misconception. The result of this work, the resource itself, may be open and free, but not necessarily the work itself. As stated before, the effort is substantial.

Another probable reason lies in the view that, being seen as technology, OER are supposed to save money and time. When a clear policy for adoption of OER is absent, it is difficult for the decision makers to accept to spend more money on this.

3. The Usual Solutions

Overall, the effort the teacher has to make, once she has agreed to adopt OER, is quite substantial. On the other hand, what will the employer, or the team running the open education scheme, propose to leverage this effort?

3 Cf. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/programmerelated/2013/Openeducationalresources.aspx>, section Open Licensing and http://poerup.referata.com/wiki/France#Copyright_in_education.

3.1. Extra Funding, Direct Rewards to the Teacher

Sometimes the institution is conscious that there is extra effort, that it needs this effort (because the institution has a visibility strategy, typically), and it is prepared to directly reward the teacher.

The following types of incentives have been identified by West & Daly (2014): large lump sum stipends, incremented stipends, gifts instead of money, pay for creation of OER, sabbaticals and other existing institutional incentive plans.

It should be noted that, in institutions that chose these incentives to get the ball rolling a few years ago, the tendency is now that enough motivation has been generated and these are no longer needed.

3.2. Promotion of Teaching Quality

In other cases, the prize may be differed: the institution will attempt to promote quality of teaching as it promotes quality of research. These promotion efforts are visible: the teacher will know that making the extra effort will result in some form of prestige or of a differed prize. The establishment of a credible academic reward system that includes OER was pointed out as one of the most important policy issue that leads to a large scale adoption in an Australian study (Hylén, 2005, p. 6).

3.3. Adding Support to the Teacher's Tasks

In this case, rather than rewarding or recognizing the work made by the teacher, the organization encourages her work by creating services that will support her. Staff that is specialized in the juridical questions regarding openness or grants that can be used to accomplish the task are some examples. This not only can save the teacher's time but also somehow demonstrates the importance of the work for the institution.

3.4. Convincing the Staff that Practices Have Changed and Adaptation is Needed

Finally, the argument used by decision makers can be that no intervention is required, as progress is just the natural sense of history, and that teachers should adapt to new technologies just because it is their job to do so. Following this view, one should not regard the creation of OER as something exceptional, worth a specific prize. The point of view is defended by two very different types of decision makers: those that no longer teach or those who are currently promoting the way teaching is (or should be) done and are possibly over-enthusiastic and sometimes fail to see that other teachers are not always so keen or have less time.

4. The Role of Technology

Arguments in favour of technology are often that it makes life simpler. Yet in the case of teaching, technology has been introduced to provide the teacher with tools she did not have before, allowing her to do her job much better, provided she uses these tools. However, it often represented an increase cost regarding time.

Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish two types of technologies proposed to teachers:

1. Time-saving technologies: as an example provided by Cuban (1996), mimeograph machines and projectors were quickly and largely adopted by teachers around the world.

2. Time-consuming technologies: computers and television, also cited by Cuban (1996), represent technologies that may enhance the quality and possibilities for the teachers' practices, but usually demanded more time and were not as well adopted in classrooms compared with time-saving technologies.

In fact, research has shown that having technology available does not mean that teachers will adopt it. The same occurs regarding OER adoption (Schuwer, Kreijns, & Vermeulen, 2014, p. 95).

5. Two Alternatives

We see two alternatives to the problem of teacher's time when adopting OER: the introduction of (or the publicity given to) time-saving technologies and/or a scenario where the teacher can do better with less work, or at least with as much work as before. Some examples:

1. Time-saving technology: a typical heavily time consuming task for the teacher is the production of metadata. This has been identified, for instance, as a blocking point in the Wikiwijs project (Schuwer et al., 2014). As a recurring theme for sessions in the past OCW Conferences, the importance and difficulty of the question is clear. On the other hand, natural language processing (NLP) research is able, today, to provide automatic transcriptions for videos, summarizations, and identification of names entities⁴.
2. A pedagogical scenario using technology to improve the results, without adding much time to the teacher's agenda is currently studied at University of Nantes. In the Informatics for beginners course, the teachers have to face a number of problems:
 - A large number of students, and hence of groups to be run in parallel;
 - The necessity to propose innovative courses, not just one that can be taught by the different instructors.

The choice which has been made is that of a first part including lectures on a wide range of topics (bio-informatics, natural language processing, distributed algorithms, cryptology and social networks); and a second part consisting of a programming course which makes use of the general topics addressed in the previous lectures.

One of the problems is that a lot of information is passed to the students, and they need time to digest it. It has therefore been proposed to record the classes and make the videos available as OER. In order to make things more interesting, we considered pedagogical scenarios allowing the students to interact better with this material. However, in most of the envisaged scenarios, the teacher's cooperation was needed and the ideas were too demanding of her time, for which we did not have any support.

We are therefore proposing to do the following:

- The teacher proposes 8 to 10 quiz questions. It should be said that she has to do this anyways for the examination;
- These quizzes are added to the video and synchronized with the moment the topic is addressed by the teacher;
- The students, when viewing the video, can not only answer a quiz (and know if they were

4 There are a number of conferences on these topics. The webpage of the Association for Computational Linguistics is a good starting point: <http://www.aclweb.org/>

right - self assessment), but also rate the quiz and even propose better quizzes (learn by teaching);

- In order to avoid overcharging the video with quizzes, the system automatically updates the list of the better quizzes proposed so far, following the evaluation made by the students.

In this way, the intervention of the teacher is kept as small as possible: she is not asked to do more than she would do anyhow, and we hope to end with a better material.

6. Conclusion

Whereas technology has usually been deployed to answer necessities identified by the teacher, and often by over-enthusiastic pedagogues who will be identifying more complex and interesting learning scenarios, we feel that (at least part of) technology should be introduced in order to help the teacher do better for an (almost) identical cost regarding time.

Technology is now being identified as a key factor to success in open education as shown by:

- The creation of the UNESCO Chair on Open Technologies for Open Educational Resources and Open Learning⁵;
- The Opening up Slovenia initiative⁶: initiatives to help promote open education in Slovenia are heavily backed by research;
- The creation of partnerships based on research in tools based on machine learning, as suggested by the Knowledge 4 All Foundation⁷.

We believe and expect new ideas and tools in this direction in the future.

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6 <http://www.ouslovenia.net/>

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