



GO-GN Special Collection: Editorial

SPECIAL COLLECTION:
GO-GN

EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

The Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN) is a global community of researchers in Open education. For this collection we invited papers from GO-GN members (past and present) to highlight the research they are undertaking and the impact of the network. As well as conventional research papers, we encouraged joint papers with other members or external to the network; shorter, work-in-progress papers; case studies or narrative accounts of OEP and suggestions for innovative formats. The collection provides an opportunity for members to showcase their work, gain feedback and demonstrate the value of the network. The GO-GN team also offered to act as mentors on request for any authors who wished to work up their contributions.

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Open Educational Resources (OER) can now claim a history that goes back at least 20-years, dating back to 2001 and MIT's announcement of the Open CourseWare project. There are several definitions of OER, but with a good deal of overlap between these. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, who funded the MIT project, define OER as:

teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. (Hewlett Foundation n.d.)

As the adoption of OER projects expanded to different countries and institutions, for example the establishment of OpenLearn at The Open University (OU), UK, so it was accompanied by research into its effectiveness. However, like many new fields, this research was often slow to materialize, and this was exacerbated in the OER field by an understandable inclination to prioritise expenditure on the creation of resources, rather than the evaluation of their usage.

However, an emergent research field began to develop, as evidenced by an increased number of publications in the field of OER. This work enabled a shift from belief-driven advocacy to evidence based decision making with regards to OER. A decade or so after the launch of the MIT Open CourseWare project saw the establishment of significant longer term research initiatives such as the OER Research Hub at the OU, ROER4D, and the Open Education Group in Utah. One such project was the Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN), founded by Professor Fred Mulder of The Open University of the Netherlands in 2013 and funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The aim of this project was to nurture an OER research community by encouraging and supporting doctoral research students in this area.

The project transitioned to The Open University, UK, in 2015, with the aim of expanding the global network. The relative novelty of OER research often resulted in a lack of local expertise in open education. By connecting to the GO-GN doctoral researchers gained access to a network of experts, and a range of services. The network also connected individual PhD researchers from different regions in the world allowing them to exchange contexts and experiences. This was particularly valuable in the global context where many researchers may not have access to others in their region, but also where OER may have the greatest impact.

It is not just PhD researchers who require support however. Many post-doctoral and early career researchers may still require access to a network of peers. As OER programmes are implemented at various levels, for example, Z-degrees in community colleges in the US, many teaching practitioners find themselves cast in the role of OER researcher. The GO-GN supported these researchers through the provision of open resources, so that their research was as valuable and robust as possible.

As well as research into openness the GO-GN seeks to develop openness as a process of research. This includes developing open dissemination approaches, releasing open data, publishing open access, and sharing findings openly. Having established itself over this period, the GO-GN is now at a level of maturity, with over 100 members, and many alumni who have gone on to shape the field of OER. There has been a slight shift in its focus to supporting enquiry not just into OER research but also that of the related area of Open Educational Practice.

This collection demonstrates the maturity and diversity of the network by gathering together eleven separate articles. The content of these articles addresses a range of OER and OEP related issues. For example, some papers focus on the educator perspective, such as Paskevicius' thoughtful piece on the establishment of educators as content creators, and Nagashima and Hrach's detailed analysis of motivating factors among faculty for adopting OER. Funk details the development of a course on workforce competence and OEP in remote northern Australia, while Asghar, Erdomu, and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen research the levels of cultural influence on pre-service teachers' intentions towards the use of OERs in Pakistan. Rodés and Gewerc are also focused on the adoption of OER, and propose a model following their work in Latin America while Chena examines this question of OER adoption from the perspective of Art History education in the US. Essmiller and Asino are interested in how academic libraries enact academic library publishing programs and the ramification that has in the diffusion process of OER in higher

education. In a work in progress paper, Elias addresses the issue of motivations and constraints in open practitioners by developing a relational map constructed in collaboration with a group of open educators. Two papers are concerned with the online pivot. Nerantzi, Chatzidamianos, Stathopoulou, and Karaouza provide an opinion piece exploring how people may connect with others socially, emotionally and cognitively in HE during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, using an OER book created with a GO-GN fellowship as an example. Havemann and Roberts reflect on the online pivot from the perspective of openness and how it was proposed and often ignored as a solution in the shift to online learning. Finally, Iniesto, Tabuenca, Rodrigo, and Tovar use GO-GN itself as a knowledge base to showcase relevant initiatives to address inclusive and sustainable development through the objectives of UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

These eleven articles demonstrate the geographical range of GO-GN, the variety of methods its researchers use and the different perspectives they take on issues in OER and OEP. This range has been a useful resource and the GO-GN team at The Open University have led on the co-production of two guides that gather this expertise together in a Research Methods Handbook and Conceptual Frameworks Guide (available at <https://go-gn.net/project-outputs/>).

2023 will mark a decade of the GO-GN project, and in that time the initial vision of Fred Mulder has been borne out. GO-GN provides an example of both how to build research within the open education community and more broadly, a means to develop a research community in any emerging field. As technology impacts on a wide range of topics, the intersection of technology and disciplines creates emergent fields with their own communities and sets of interests. For any such area there are likely to be a number of priorities, founding beliefs and motivations. Research is an essential tool in establishing these areas, and allowing fields to develop around agreed foundations. However, in emergent areas there is often a lack of established funding agencies to promote such research. There is, though, a wide range of doctoral students who are often keen to explore such topics.

There can be a mismatch between these doctoral researchers and the amount of support and supervision available. GO-GN researchers, although all appropriately supervised in their studies, are often the main expert in OER in their institution. They frequently describe finding GO-GN as a vital element in their support and motivation to completing their studies. The network has now established itself, with influential alumni, and a global reputation. It has provided a significant contribution in establishing a global OER research community that is evidenced through active participation in conferences such as OEGlobal, and the UK OER conference, OpenEd.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Martin Weller is the Director of GO-GN.

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