

Open Educational Resources in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Research with the EC Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS)

Starting point: open educational resources in lifelong learning

The Europe 2020 strategy acknowledges that a fundamental transformation of education and training is needed if Europe is to remain competitive, overcome the current economic crisis and grasp new opportunities. Open Educational Resources (OER) are perceived as providing a strategic opportunity to improve the quality of education as well as facilitating policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and capacity building. Yet was a lack of evidence on how OER can be, or are, used to promote lifelong learning and adult education.

Data collection

An inventory of over 150 initiatives that develop, promote, or use OER was compiled and they were categorised into types, based on their primary activity. The initiatives were surveyed on their experiences. At the same time, we surveyed adult learners across Europe on their practices with internet resources, and interviewed five OER experts.

Analysis

Responses from the surveys were judged against key themes from 15 vision papers for lifelong learning in 2030 commissioned by IPTS. These were remarkably coherent in envisaging a future in which there is:

- Control by the learner
- Teachers as mentors or facilitators of learning rather than directors
- Open access to information
- Provision of OER by individuals as well as institutions
- Recognition for sharing OER

Conclusions

OER, and the practices associated with them, are an immensely powerful idea that

potentially makes a significant difference to education systems, but under-estimating the degree of cultural change needed to optimise their value, and the power of vested interests endangers realising this potential. Most OER aimed at adults are provided by universities with a traditional teaching context in mind and little knowledge of the ways in which resources are actually used by adult learners.



Figure 1: the OER4Adults typology

Impact

EC policy makers have taken on our findings that little is known about OER provision that is not linked to formal higher or school level education, which has significant implications for policy (given the 75 million low-skilled in Europe; the lack of access to ICT for many etc). OER in Europe are dominated by resources in English and French and that much should be done to make OER available in smaller language groups. They have also agreed the need to be clearer about what is meant by “adult learning” to provide better focus for ongoing research and policies.

Project team

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The Caledonian Academy is a research centre in Technology Enhanced and Professional Learning at Glasgow Caledonian University.