

# **The role of OER localisation in building a knowledge partnership for development: Comparing the TESSA and TESS-India teacher education projects**

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

As ever more OER are produced with the aim of widening access to learning in international contexts, debates around the localisation of OER have been increasingly voiced (e.g. Teemant, Taylor and West, 2011). It is generally agreed that sharing OER across continents is not just a matter of distributing resources to those who need them on a 'one size fits all' basis - 'whereby the rich north would push these resources at the south without thought of reciprocity' (Glennie et al 2012:v) - a notion that has been criticised for reflecting neo-colonial practices. Bateman, Lane and Moon (2012) observe a tendency for the OER Movement to be seen as (and see itself as) 'benevolent, developed country 'providers' of OER' as distinct from 'passive, developing country 'users' of them' while Miyagawa (2005) warns that by ignoring such concerns we may see a global information society resembling 'a map of the world in the 16th century composed of those that colonize and those that are colonized.'

It is clear that for OER to be truly valuable to educators and learners, they need to be adapted to suit the contexts in which they are to be used, and adapted by those with a nuanced understanding of these contexts. Adapting OER for local contexts remains one of the greatest challenges of the open education movement (Wolfenden and Buckler, 2012) and very little has been written about how to support communities of users to adapt materials. Indeed, an outcome of the 2012 UNESCO World OER Congress in Paris was the note that OER producers need to give more attention to reuse and repurposing.

This paper is intended to extend the global conversation about how best to localise OER through adaptation and repurposing. It maps the landscape of OER for teacher education in low-income countries and presents a continuum between cultural imperialism to cultural knowledge sharing. Drawing in particular on the experiences of two UK-based teacher education OER projects - the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) programme and the Teacher Education through School-based Support in India (TESS-India) project - the paper presents an emerging toolkit for developers of OERs to move initiatives along the continuum to ensure more equitable and sustainable OER development and use.

### **Context**

The UK Open University-led TESS-India project is developing OER, co-produced by UK and Indian academics, for use within India's teacher education system. The project aims to enhance the access of teacher educators, headteachers and teachers to free, high-quality educational materials that they can use in their colleges and classrooms. TESS-India will be delivering its 'teacher development units' (TDUs) and 'leadership development units' (LDUs) across seven Indian states.

The TESS-India project was developed following the success of TESSA. The original TESSA consortium consisted of nine Sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Zambia) and the original TESSA materials were developed as OERs in five subject areas before being translated and adapted into country-specific versions.

For both projects, such broad distribution necessitates localisation of resources to meet the end users' linguistic, cultural and pedagogic needs. Both TESSA and TESS-India adopted a two-tier model of localisation. In line with OER practice, use of the creative commons framework for all resources will allow for adaptation by the end users: teacher educators, headteachers and teachers. However, an earlier stage of supported, state-level adaptation is embedded within the production process via a series of workshops in which local academics work together to version resources in terms of language, imagery and cultural references.

In TESSA, adaptation was structured, certain elements of the template were protected, and workshops were conducted across regions and coordinated by academics from the UK's Open University. In TESS-India adaptation is guided but less restrictive, achieved through workshops coordinated and led by a third party (the Indian NGO, Pratham) and conducted in each state for which the adaptation is intended.

## **Methods**

This paper explores and critiques these two methods, and other approaches to OER localisation, with the intention of developing a toolkit of positive practices to facilitate OER adaptation for OER producers. The study follows the TESS-India localisation process as it takes place in workshops across three Indian states between November 2013 - February 2014 and evaluates the resulting localised materials. The study intends to make explicit the form and structure, and the necessary iterative nature and contextualisation of the *process* - as well as the outputs - across the three states, and debates tensions between changing context while retaining concepts.

The main data-collection activity constitutes participant observation at the three workshops, allowing for detailed examination of the ways in which those tasked with localising the resources work together to identify aspects of the adaptation. Additional data is being collected in the form of workshop reports from Pratham and TESS-India colleagues; interviews with participants and analysis of the change logs that localisers are keeping in order to document the changes they suggest as well as their rationale for suggesting those changes. The findings of the TESS-India experience will be analysed alongside data from the TESSA project including a retrospective analysis of TESSA adaptation data and interviews with participants in the TESSA adaptation process.

## **Emerging findings and discussion**

Emerging findings from the first TESS-India workshops suggest resistance on behalf of participants to make significant changes to the OER. Workshop facilitators have incorporated last-minute sessions emphasising the pedagogical

underpinnings of the OER which were unfamiliar to some participants, as well as placing greater emphasis on the nature of an OER. The facilitators have also requested a larger number of subject specialists in future workshops to support the participants and to reassure them that the changes they are making to context do not undermine the focus of the activities (this has been especially the case in the science subjects). Unforeseen translation issues have also arisen leading to the formulation of a set of principles for translation to ensure accuracy, clarity and consistency.

These issues that are emerging from the early workshops have highlighted a possible barrier to full engagement with OER in India; a disinclination to disrupt hierarchical notions about who owns (and should own) knowledge and who should share it. Joanna Wild's stairway model of educators' engagement with OER is relevant here (see Wild, Pegler *et al*, 2012). In this model, low engagement involves educators using and sharing resources with no adaptation, medium engagement involves educators integrating OER into core teaching materials and 'tweaking' them to meet their own needs, and high engagement involves producing and sharing OER and becoming an advocate for OER use. Getting beyond a low-engagement, piecemeal use of OER is important to the resources' potential being fully realised and requires a fluid, democratic approach to knowledge ownership and resource-sharing. However, we argue that this is only possible if more attention is accorded to issues of user access, skills and confidence to imagine and realise localisation.

The two-tier TESSA and TESS-India localisation process, with their quite directive initial phase of resource adaptation, intend to offer a way of ensuring that the changes that are needed to meet local needs actually do take place during the production process, while also allowing for further localisation by teachers and teacher-educators once they have bought in to the resources' use within their own practice. However, we situate our analysis of these two processes within international development discourse. We draw on two paradigms in particular, first the notion of 'knowledge for development' driven by the World Bank (2013) and others. Obamba (2013:127) indicates a 'clear shift' towards the conflation of development with learning or knowledge, and McArthur and Sachs (2009) suggest that a knowledge production paradigm is increasingly emphasised in contemporary development theory and practice. Alongside this we consider the 'partnership for development' paradigm popularised by policy papers such as DfID's (2005) 'Partnerships for Poverty Reduction' document and the older, but still referenced, OECD (1997) approach to development that emphasises collaboration and contextual embeddedness.

We suggest that OER can represent a new, combined, paradigm: one of knowledge partnerships for development, but only if more attention is given to understanding how communities can be supported to adapt, use and develop educational materials. Our research on the TESSA and TESS-India localisation process should be of value to others involved in OER initiatives within low-income countries in that it extends the debate around ways to adapt resources to meet local needs. We conclude that developing a community of practice around the use, re-use and adaptation of OER necessarily involves engaging with criticisms of neo-colonialism in order to move towards a knowledge partnership approach that allows for the mutually beneficial sharing of expertise and contextual

understanding of producers and users, and one that blurs the line between the two.