Chapter 7
Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching at the African University

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Abstract In this chapter, we focus on three purposively selected African universities that have embraced open education, open learning and open teaching, and discuss possible reasons why others have only partially or not at all taken the "open" route. Evidence on the status of Open Education is generated using a non-obtrusive methodology embedded within social media. Official Facebook sites for three universities in Eswatini, South Africa and Zambia are purposively selected and further interrogated retrospectively for a period of 12 months to elicit discussion from the posts of staff and students on the phenomenon under study. Given the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic, it becomes imperative that we take a closer look at Higher Education and how it has responded to the demands of the "new normal" which have compelled nearly all institutions to adopt open teaching and open learning approaches to survive. In the first instance, definitions of the concept of open education and its "relatives", open teaching and open learning, are considered. Consensus on the meaning and depth of these notions is important for wider roll-out. The chapter then goes on to describe some enablers and disablers that make teaching and learning more "open" to achieve the sustainable development goals related to education.

Keywords Africa · Open education · Open teaching · Open learning policy and implementation · University

7.1 Introduction

Although the term Open Education is not new, there have been multiple interpretations and, as we will see below, the Open Education movement has several dimensions. At the end of the 1960s-early 1970s, discussions on opening up education and classrooms were initiated in the UK and the USA. In the documents from those days, the focus is on "opening possibilities and responsibilities to teachers as well

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as to children" (Bussis & Chittenden, 1970). The principles associated with open education then include respect, honesty and warmth (Bussis & Chittenden, 1970), trust, choice and flexibility (Evans, 1971). Walberg and Thomas (1971) identified several characteristics of open education: attention to children's thinking processes, more individual attention, less focus on goals, growth opportunities for all stakeholders. It is also noteworthy that, at that point in time, "open" was often equated to "informal" (Katz, 1972). However, a commonly accepted definition of open education was sorely lacking as, apart from vague statements like "open education is a way of thinking about" (idem), nothing much was available. Walberg and Thomas (1972, p. 97) defined Open Education as "a chance for real attention to individual learning, respect for the child, authentic relationships, and opportunities for both teacher and child to participate in significant learning". In 1975, Don Tunnell was one of the first to look into the definition and concept of Open Education. Over the years, Open Education has been characterised as learning by doing, informal learning, a holistic approach, real-world learning ("authentic learning"), etc.

Today, a definition such as Walker's (in Iiyoshi and Kumar, p. 77) shows how far the concept has come: Open Education is "education that is available to virtually any learner, is within his or her means, and results in meeting his or her learning objectives". Openness also refers to transparency of practice and activity, to inclusiveness, to personalised learning, among other qualities. In this chapter, we examine some of the Open Education dimensions, in particular those of Open Teaching and Open Learning, in view of finding out which situations and contexts are enablers to the Open Education movement and which ones form barriers to a wider acceptance of the main principles of Open Education. Iiyoshi and Kumar noted, as the key tenet of the movement, that "education can be improved by making educational assets visible and accessible and by harnessing the collective wisdom of a community of practice and reflection" (2008, p. 2). This refers to Open Access mainly, but other important principles include agency, ownership, participation, inclusion, equity and experience.

7.2   Context

This chapter was written against the background of the importance and urgency of Open Education, Open Teaching and Open Learning within the ambit of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (https:// sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs). SDG4 is about "Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Open Education, in the form of open resources (Open Textbooks, Open Educational Resources and Open Licensing) and practices (including Open Pedagogy and Open Educational Practices such as Open Teaching and Open Learning and related Open Assessment and Open Badges as well as Open Standards), was explicitly linked

to SDG4 by various authors and international declarations (e.g. the Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017).

Seen as an overall philosophy, Open Education deals with the way people produce, share and build on knowledge, which is a basic human right. Proponents of Open Education work towards eliminating barriers to this goal, such as prohibitive monetary costs, outdated or obsolete materials, or legislation that prevents or inhibits collaboration among stakeholders in the educational realm. Open Education presents a number of important advantages for different stakeholders in education. For learners, these are, among others, the fact that the knowledge they acquire is applied to a wide context; learning opportunities can be accessed anywhere, at any time; learning materials are centred on the learners, respond to learners' needs and social/collaborative/active learning (socio-constructivist and connectivist) approaches are used. The advantages of Open Education for teachers include that users of OER and Open Textbooks can give feedback and this can lead to continuous revision and updating of the teaching and learning materials and practices. The open sharing of ideas, information, data, practices and strategies is beneficial to all involved. Specifically looking at Open Educational Resources and Open Content, their transformative educational potential can be described as follows: the increased availability of high quality, relevant learning materials will contribute to better performing learners and teachers, and make it possible to adapt existing materials through a collaborative approach. This way of working can give both learners and educators an opportunity, as active participants, to learn by doing and creating, one of the main skills necessary in the twenty-first century.

Open Education also includes the opening up of the teaching process: in Open Teaching, teachers "are able to share and participate in the trials and successes of their fellow educators as they tweet and blog about their work. This process can be as simple as posting ideas for the classroom or as profound as posting daily reflections on the successes and failures of different approaches" (Cormier & Siemens, 2018, pp. 34–35). Before listing our research questions, it is essential to briefly examine who are the main open education stakeholders, apart from the obvious ones—already included above—learners and educators.

Who could have a particular interest in Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching? Librarians, textbook publishers, but also ministries, inspectors and education administrators alike. With Open Education, teachers and lecturers get assigned at least one new role, that of "scholar-curators associated with data and primary content information resources serving as guides and teachers to individuals and learning communities wanting to directly engage these resources in cyberspace" (Iiyoshi and Kumar, p. 115). Laurillard (2008) stated, based on Dalziel's (2005) definition of "open source teaching" as what happens in an environment in which "educators can freely and openly share best practice teaching", that Open Teaching combines the following four characteristics: (1) support for some personal development in how to teach; (2) the means to build on the work of others to design their approach; (3) the means to experiment and reflect on what the results imply for their design and their understanding; and (4) the means to articulate and disseminate their contribution.

7.3 Research Questions

To explore the Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching phenomenon in selected African universities, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the current status of Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching?
2. What are the enablers to Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching?
3. What are the disablers to Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching?

7.4 Methodology

In order to explore Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching at selected African universities, we adopted an unobtrusive method with a focus on document review on the phenomenon under study. According to Rathje (1979) and Babbie (1989) (in Simui et al., 2018c), an unobtrusive approach studies the actual rather than reported behaviour. This approach could be repeated as it is non-disruptive, non-reactive, easily accessible, inexpensive and a good source of longitudinal data. In addition, unobtrusive research methods offer a strong critique of positivism, the concept that truths about the social world can be determined through scientific measurement. Instead, these methods belong to the epistemological theory of interpretivism which is that the social sciences are fundamentally different from natural sciences; therefore, they require researchers to reject empiricism and grasp subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2004). In terms of ontological considerations, unobtrusive methods fit into the constructionism theory whereby social phenomena and their meanings are continually accomplished and revised by social actors (Bryman, 2004). The unobtrusive approach was well suited for this particular study as it relied on social media (Facebook) and website sources on Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching about selected African universities which could be extrapolated into longitudinal data in a non-reactive and non-disruptive environment. This is consistent with the ideas of the founders of the unobtrusive method, Webb et al. (1966) who argued that unobtrusive research methods are presumed to avoid the problems caused by the researcher's presence. In addition, unobtrusive methods, because they do not disrupt research participants, are easily repeatable.

7.5 Sample Size

The sample had a double layer from participating universities with the first layer consisting of 11 universities selected among institutions practising Open Education while the second layer included only 3 universities whose participants shared in-depth views on the phenomenon under study. Both the first and second layers of sampled

universities contributed to the discourse via their official Facebook sites available to the public. A purposive sample was used in this study (Kemper et al., 2003). It was chosen to address qualitative demands such as the need for reflexivity, fit for purpose, availability and accessibility. In carrying out this study, we used Official Blue Button Facebook sites available and accessible to the public to construct impressions on Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching in purposively selected universities across Africa, namely the University of Cape Town, Cairo University, Marsoura University, University of Ibadan, University of Ghana, University of Nairobi, Open University of Tanzania, Zimbabwe Open University, University of South Africa, University of Zambia and University of Eswatini.

The second layer had the following universities that participated, namely (Pseudonyms) Saniso, Zamisa and Eswoni. The universities were selected on the basis of their active involvement in Open and Distance Education as single or dual-mode institutions as well as their being lead universities in their respective countries. The elicited information was cross-checked by insider informants to avoid the usual emic/etic problems. This means that interpretation of physical traces or observations may be from the point of view of the stranger or outsider (etic) and, therefore, may fail to grasp important in-group meanings (emic).

Table 7.1 shows the pseudonyms used of the key participating countries and universities involved in Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching within Africa as elicited through the document review research process, their countries, university, mode of delivery of services to their learners.

7.6 Data Generation Procedure

In carrying out this study, we used official Facebook sites with blue button focused on African higher education institutions purposively selected where Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching was practised. Emergent from the literature review on Open Education, Teaching and Learning is a checklist with key pointers to open education which we used as a guide to explore the Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching phenomena. An online WordArt generator was applied to generate the checklist (see Fig. 7.1).

To examine the phenomenon of "openness" being the critical feature, we used social media, in particular Facebook, and other official platforms openly and widely used by universities for communication purposes. Evidence on the universities' views of Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching was generated from these online environments. We applied non-participant observer techniques to enlist student members on official institutional Facebook platforms and then conducted a review for a period of 6 months to 1 year retrospectively for each institution to unearth related issues to Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching. The researchers took time to get immersed into student and staff teaching–learning cultures ethnographically and to identify enablers and disablers to the learning experiences within the framework of Open Education.

Table 7.1 Key participating universities

	Participants (Pseudonym)	University (Pseudonym)	Country
1	AAunisa	Saniso	South Africa
2	AAunza	Zamisa	Zambia
3	BOunisa	Saniso	South Africa
4	BZuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
5	CKunza	Zamisa	Zambia
6	DFunisa	Saniso	South Africa
7	ENunisa	Saniso	South Africa
8	FLunza	Zamisa	Zambia
9	GHunisa	Saniso	South Africa
10	GMuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
11	HJunisa	Saniso	South Africa
12	JKunisa	Saniso	South Africa
13	JMunza	Zamisa	Zambia
14	JOunisa	Saniso	South Africa
15	JPunisa	Saniso	South Africa
16	KKunza	Zamisa	Zambia
17	KLuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
18	KMunisa	Saniso	South Africa
19	LMunza	Zamisa	Zambia
20	LNunisa	Saniso	South Africa
21	MFuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
22	MKuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
23	MMuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
24	MTunisa	Saniso	South Africa
25	MWunisa	Saniso	South Africa
26	NJuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
27	NSunisa	Saniso	South Africa
28	NZunisa	Saniso	South Africa
29	OPunisa	Saniso	South Africa
30	PKunisa	Saniso	South Africa
31	PMunisa	Saniso	South Africa
32	SLunisa	Saniso	South Africa
33	SSuneswa	Eswoni	Eswatini
34	XKunsa	Zamisa	Zambia
35	YJunisa	Saniso	South Africa
36	YLunisa	Saniso	South Africa
37	YYunisa	Saniso	South Africa

Fig. 7.1 Pointers to open education

7.7 Trustworthiness

In this study, Guba's (1981) four criteria on trustworthiness were applied. They are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The data generation process was triangulated using observation, document review and individual interviews. The researchers used a reflexivity approach to decipher meaning from generated data. In addition, the researchers had early familiarity with the culture of the participants prior to data generation. The data generation procedure and boundaries were documented for the purposes of ensuring transferability of the study findings to different settings. Further, the elicited information was cross-checked by participants to avoid the usual emic/etic problems. This means that interpretation of physical traces or observations may be from the point of view of the stranger, or outsider (etic), and therefore may fail to grasp important in-group meanings (emic) (Berry, 1989). Given that the findings were presented verbatim, coupled with participant checks on the research, the study meets the dependability and confirmability criteria as well.

7.8 Findings and Discussion

Emergent from the data mined on institutional platforms and through Facebook was the engagement of learners through social media as noted in Fig. 7.2:

Status on Open knowledge sharing via Facebook.

The descriptive statistics above suggest that UNISA had the largest following of 896,264 as at 24 September 2020 and their services were liked by 841,484 users of the page. UNISA's Facebook has been in existence since 20 May 2009. Second position was Cairo University in Egypt with 606,551 followers and 602,888 Likes. This
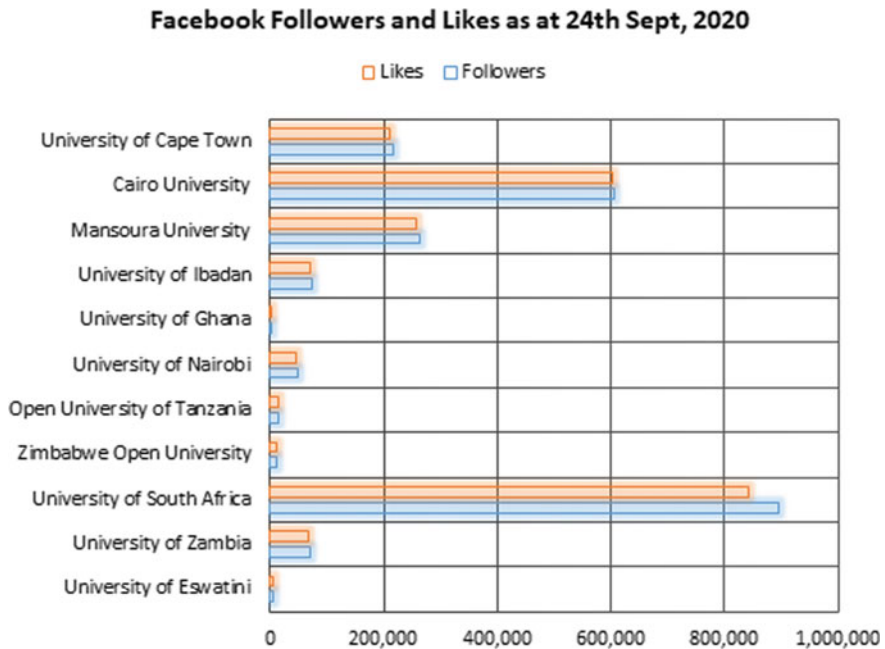
Fig. 7.2 Status on open knowledge sharing via Facebook

university's Facebook page was created on 20 February 2011. Mansoura University in Egypt created its Facebook page on 9 March 2011 and was in third place with 262,534 followers and 256,456 Likes. Mansoura University was closely followed by the University of Cape Town with 218,224 followers and 209,018 Likes on a Facebook page created on 13 January 2010. The rest of the universities selected recorded below 74,000 followers with the University of Ibadan in Nigeria recording 72,778 Followers and 70,501 Likes on a Facebook page created on 27 November 2011, while the University of Ghana had the least number of followers at 367 and Likes at 355 recorded on its official Facebook page created on 4 April 2013. Simui et al. (2018b) observe that social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp are critical ingredients for effective learner support services for distance education. Thus, given the important numbers of learners using social media, open information sharing is enhanced. However, not all learners and learning facilitators are comfortable with use of ICTs for teaching–learning purposes due to what some refer to as the digital immigrants syndrome (Mwewa & Namangala, 2019). Muleya et al. (2019).

In addition, the following emerged as themes to explain the status of Open Learning, Open Teaching and Open education within Higher Education in Africa: Peer support, Staff support, Equity, Cost, Communication, Application of ICTs and Assessment among others. We organised these emergent themes according to whether they can be seen as enablers or disablers of Open Education, as identified in student

and staff discourse published on social media and online communication (official university websites).

7.8.1 Enablers to Open Education

A number of enablers to Open Education were established such as peer support, staff support and inclusion of diversity as catalysts for innovation among others.

7.8.1.1 Peer Support

The link between OER and peer support has been noted by Fetter et al. (2012), and Seely Brown and Adler (2008), among others. This is what students had to say on their institutional Facebook pages*: I'm doing HC Financial Accounting this year and want to do a degree next year. My question is, do I apply or automatically I'm depending on whether I pass or not this year?* (DFunisa, 2020).

In turn, DFunisa's question was responded to by MTunisa, a fellow student who gave the following advice: *Apply because they don't know your plans about your certificate whether you just want to use it as a bridge or for looking for a job* (MTunisa, 2020). Equally, JOunisa wanted to know the quality of services for undergraduate students in comparison with postgraduate services. He noted,

> If I may ask, is [Saniso]'s postgrad services as bad as undergrad? My question is based on the fact that during registrations, you will find that postgrad students are given some well deserved preferential treatment. They don't stand on those long lines the whole day. (JOunisa, 2020)

It is clear from JOunisa's submission that undergraduate students were not pleased with the quality of support during the registration period. In addition, YYunisa posed a question to fellow peers,

> Greetings guys. My question is, if you are a final year student and you want to do a postgraduate qualification next year do you apply now? Or wait for your results in December?.coz I've been trying to apply and the system wants me to attach completed qualification. (YYunisa, 2020)

While peer support proved to be a critical positive ingredient in Open Learning, there were moments when learner-to-learner misinformation was noted. For instance, LNunisa was confronted by PKunisa, a peer, for having misinformed other learners as noted below. LNunisa noted that,

> Did you know that Unisa is Capitec registered beneficiary? I mean you can pay your application fee or study fee, using the Capitec App. You just have to use the correct allocation reference. (LNunisa, 2020)

The above claim by LNunisa was corrected by PKunisa as follows:

No. It is not capitec my sister, stop misleading us, it was standard bank and now fnb, so wena what u doing is cellphone banking, you are using capitec app to transfer your money to [Saniso] fnb account, obviously u have to put ur ref n student no to show what is that money for, [Saniso] doesn't have capitec bank account, u can do transfer with any bank to any bank. (PKunisa, 2020)

The active peer engagement above (relating to various study-related matters) appears to have enabled learners to succeed in their academic enterprise as supported by Sinclair (2017). Accordingly to Sinclair, peer support for e-learners is vital to their academic success. In her study, she noted that students placed great emphasis on the importance of peer support, with more than half of the respondents explicitly stating that their peers were helpful to them regarding educational needs, such as finishing their degree and passing their courses (Sinclair, 2017).

7.8.1.2 Staff Support

While in a study in the UK, staff did not understand the meaning of Open Education and their role within it (e.g. Harold & Rolfe, 2019), in the selected African universities under study staff seemed to comprehend the vital role a learning facilitator plays. For instance, FLunza noted that,

Thanks to our dedicated lecturers. The knowledge you imparted in us meets the demands of the current educational management systems. May God bless you as u serve our great nation Zambia. (FLunza, 2020)

While the role played by learning facilitators in the Open Education enterprise cannot be overemphasised, *AAunisa* noted the complementary input that learners needed to contribute. He noted that,

A residential school is usually for students to interact with lecturers and highlights grey areas picked from your course modules [in an Open Education setting online] Lecturers let you run the show and they provide guidelines. The programme is fully self-study. (AAunisa, 2020)

In addition, the need for a responsive school calendar that takes the concerns of learners on board was stressed as a vital ingredient to the academic success of learners. Staff have an important role to play in crafting a responsive school calendar. For instance, WJunza noted the following: *my humble request to the management is that you may make residential periods during school holidays so that it is easy to get permission* (WJunza, 2020).

In line with FLunza, AAunisa and WJunza, Ouma and Nkuyubwatsi (2019) advocate for transformation of university learner support in open and distance education. In their study, it was noted that inadequate faculty support from university management and limited distance learners' representation in their leadership and governance was rampant in Uganda (Ouma & Nkuyubwatsi, 2019).

7.8.1.3 Inclusion and Diversity

Open Education is expected to be open to all learners. However, learners across the universities practising Open Education reported experiences where learners with disabilities were marginalised and excluded. For instance, at Saniso, YLunisa noted that,

> Students leaving [sic] with disabilities were neglected totally during May/June 2020 examinations and are neglected once more during semester 2 registrations and as we approach October/November 2020 Examinations, they never received their promised devices which have different specifications to level with their respective disabilities. (YLunisa, 2020)

Supposedly, ICTs are enablers to effective inclusive education (Simui, 2018). However, negative attitudes and practices as cited above are a major barrier to effective inclusive education (Simui, 2018; Simui et al., 2018a). Thus, inclusion and diversity should be viewed as catalysts for creativity and innovation among learners and learning facilitators.

7.8.2 Disablers to Open Education

While enablers were noted above, disablers to successful application of Open Education were voiced out by learners. Disablers included the negative side effects of ICTs on the health of the learners, cost of open education, Inaccessible free Data Bundles, Open Cheating in formative Assessment and Covid-19 Effects on Open Education among others.

7.8.2.1 Negative Effects of ICT on Learners' Health

Whereas ICTs are highly appreciated for serving as catalysts to Open Education, there are negative side effects associated with their continuous use, especially on the sight of users. For instance, HJunisa retorted:

> By the time i graduate, my eyesight would be bad news. This thing of reading on a laptop is straining me. I have been hoping that my study material would be delivered by now. (HJunisa, 2020)

Equally, HJunisa noted that *reading from the laptop is damaging my eyesight, when is* [Saniso] *mailing the study material?* (HJunisa, 2020). Woo et al. (2016) observe that information and communication technology has harmful effects on the health of learners. For example, according to the American Optometric Association, a person who exceeds 2 h of computer use per day is at risk of computer vision syndrome (CVS) (Woo et al., 2016).

7.8.2.2 High Cost of Open Education

Open Education is often equated, in popular parlance, to free education. However, there exist prohibitive tuition fees in some learning institutions as observed by MMunza, *consider reducing the fees for PHD. Too expensive* (MMunza, 2020). Most consumers of Open Education goods and services do not appreciate upward adjustments to tuition fees, as observed by AAunza, *Hello. I am in the process of registering for my courses for the 2017/2 academic year MBA Year 2 and I've noticed that the amount is K2000 per course. Have the prices* (AAunza, 2020).

The cost of education was compounded by the effects of Covid-19 as observed in Eswatini. For example, MMuneswa argued that,

> our economic situation and the University's I guess, is also struggling to the core. We wish to engage in this initiative but it is not possible because of the limitations that have been caused by this pandemic. I personally don't even have the requested gadgets. I borrowed the phone from a neighbour. I lost my job and life is difficult. (MMuneswa, 2020)

While the cost of Open Education was noted to be high in the three studied universities, it has to be highlighted as well that Open Educational Resources should make it possible to lower textbook costs. Clinton (2018) advocates for the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) developed to free students from the expense and instructors from the restrictions of commercial materials. A study on a Cost, Outcomes, Usage, and Perceptions framework indicates that OER adoption yielded cost savings while generally having similar or better outcomes in terms of grades (Clinton, 2018).

Flexibility and user-friendly fees play a critical role in the successful implementation of Online Distance learning as noted by MWunisa, *Hi there.* [Saniso] *is a distance learning university for those of us that work. And it is the cheapest for people who pay their own* (MWunisa, 2020). Huang et al. (2020) advocate for the presence of the following five conditions, namely OER, Open Teaching, Open Collaboration, Open Assessment and enabling technology, for any meaningful Open Education Practices can take place. Huang et al. (2020) emphasised that, in OEP, students are encouraged to carry on with flexible learning.

7.8.2.3 Inaccessible Free Data Bundles

ICTs were noted to be vital tools for effective Open Teaching–Learning processes to take root. For instance, Eswoni reported the availability of free data bundles to assist with online learning as noted by KLuneswa,

> All our students are requested to ensure that they have the correct MTN mobile number submitted with their Faculty Administrator to ensure they receive a 3GB data bundle to assist with online learning. The bundles can be used to visit websites belonging to Regent, Moodle, Exams council of Eswatini, Eswoni …. (KLuneswa, 2020)

However, ICTs availability and accessibility among learners appears to have been a challenge as noted in the response of one of the staff members at Eswoni:

Your concerns have been noted and will be forwarded to the relevant Department. Eswoni cares about the utmost well-being of all students and will do whatever it takes to take care of your needs. (BZuneswa, 2020)

7.8.2.4 Inappropriate Pedagogy of Open Teaching

Open Teaching and Open Learning call for the appropriate pedagogy in the use of online resources as noted by MFuneswa, 2020. The student advocated for the following:

Please record the lecturer delivering their lessons. Make them into short 5 mins to 15 mins videos for each topic or section. Then we will download those videos and watch them then ask questions and do the assignment later. We all know that streaming through Zoom or Google Classroom will take more data than what MTN provides at cheap prices. By the way, that is how I take my lessons at an online university I am currently enrolled in…. (MFuneswa, 2020)

This indicates the need for training of both students and staff, management included.

7.8.2.5 Inaccessible Internet Facilities

Inevitably, ICTs are a catalyst to Open Education. As noted in Fig. 7.1, higher education institutions were riding on ICTs platforms to communicate with their learners during the Covid-19 pandemic, as conventional approaches, which include face-to-face interactions, could not be of assistance. In some institutions, even examinations were administered through online platforms. This was the case with Saniso and Eswoni universities as observed by PMunisa, NJuneswa and KMunisa,

when results came out the three multiple choice exams were fine but the other 2 they said absent from examination, I have sent proof of submission hundred times and have been sent from pillar to post. Right now I'm frustrated because I studied and wrote the exams but now I have no results….I wonder whether it's worth it for me to study and write them at this point in time. I am frustrated with online exams. (PMunisa, 2020)

It is true that not all students are set up for online learning and students who are from poor families, especially in Africa, have less access to key tools. Covid-19 has exposed the technological divide that exists in our society. You might have a laptop, access to Wifi at home or you can afford to purchase data bundles to learn online. But what about the student who does not have access to all this? (NJuneswa, 2020)

Guys I didn't submit any assignment, because I had no access to the Internet until last week so some of them have closed already, which means I won't be able to write some of the modules even if I wanted to. (KMunisa, 2020)

Students' reactions indicate the level of frustration with some of the online delivery modes and requirements. Rahman (2014) observes that Open and Distance Learning is getting more dependent on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and now plays an important role in the delivery strategies of distance learning. Educational technologies are replacing direct teacher-student interaction. Anything that

helps distance learners communicate—learner with instructor, learner with learner and learner with the learning materials—may be labelled as educational technology. Similarly, Ali (2020) observes that, in the light of the rising concerns about the spread of Covid-19 and calls to contain the pandemic, a growing number of tertiary institutions around the world have shut down their face-to-face classes. The coronavirus has revealed emerging vulnerabilities in education systems globally. It is now clear that society needs flexible and resilient education systems as we face unpredictable futures. Inevitably, universities worldwide are moving more and more towards online learning or E-Learning. Apart from resources, staff readiness and confidence, accessibility and motivation play important functions in ICT-integrated learning. For example, SLunisa noted this: *In the online examination, I had to apply what I learned, and it was tough. But still, I prefer online examination, because it doesn't make me feel anxious* (SLunisa, 2020).

7.8.2.6 Negative Attitude

Negative attitude was yet another disabler to academic success in the Open Education space. For example, SSuneswa lamented the negative attitude from staff and/or management experienced at the University of Eswoni. The student stated:

> What's with this appalling attitude of making the students feel like this arrangement is being gifted to them? Start addressing the students like stakeholders, not like beneficiaries of some benevolence by the university. They have earned their place there. Please. (SSuneswa, 2020)

Another student reported her frustration with online registration processes: *Student registrations to date are still being finalised and assignments have been postponed more than 2 times while we count only days to October/November Examinations* (GHunisa, 2020).

7.8.2.7 Poor Communication

Communication between learners and their respective institutions was noted to be ineffective in some instances such as the one reported by SAunisa,

> Does anyone know if there are any staff working at [Saniso]? I have been emailing remarks and the finance department since October 2019 and from then till now I have received no correspondence from them, but they have received my funds and provide me with no service that I paid for. I even sent a mail to say fine if you don't want to remark then refund me. But still nothing. They don't respond but they can send statements every month. Hai. Nonsense. (SAunisa, 2020)

Equally, ENunisa re-echoed SAunisa's observations as well. She retorted that she was…

> so worried that till this day I haven't received any timetable and exams will commence next month. So when are we going to get the dates and time? This you will be informed thing is

making me sick (ENunisa, 2020). I am also still waiting. I have a 4th year module. Submitted in June and have been waiting for 3 months. (BOunisa, 2020)

BOunisa's concerns are similar to what Musingafi et al. (2015) reported at the Zimbabwe Open University. They noted that ODL learners were challenged by a range of obstacles in their course of studies. The most reported challenges were lack of sufficient time for study, difficulties in access and use of ICT, ineffective feedback and lack of study materials (Musingafi et al., 2015).

Despite the reported challenges in communication between learners and their respective universities, our study participants noted a significant number of announcements which were meant to convey messages from the university side. For instance, at the University of Zamisa, the marketing officer posted announcements on the Facebook platform on several occasions, as noted:

To all graduands participating in the Virtual Graduation Ceremony on 31st July 2020, kindly note that you can have your portrait taken at [Zamisa] Customer Service Centre on the following dates: Saturday 27.06.2020 9-13hrs...Kindly deposit K50 in any of the following bank accounts for the service …. (CKunza, 2020)

7.8.2.8 Open Cheating in Assessments

"Open Cheating" was noted to be a barrier to successful Open Education implementation. We use this terminology to describe the advertising of unlawful means and ways to obtain grades. Students are addressed directly, online, with proposals of "assistance": outsiders indicate that they are willing, for a fee, to do the students' assignments, etc. The challenge of Open Cheating was reported by the University of Zamisa. For example, *L*Munza*,*

Are you a Postgraduate (Phd, Masters) or undergraduate student having difficulties/problems in Research, proposal Writings or assignments/projects. Call or whatsapp this line for help *097822XXXX*. (LMunza, 2020)

Similarly, at Saniso, Open Cheating was noted as NZunisa, among others, advertised the following services: *If you need help with assignments, solutions all modules whatsapp at 072076XXXX or call 071722XXXX or portfolio or exam packs or exam preparation* (NZunisa, 2020). Another instance of such encouragement of Open Cheating, was noted here: *If you need any assistance regarding any Assignments, Portfolio and online sessions, please kindly inbox or text me on WhatsApp 065517XXXX. Graduate easily with distinctions* (NSunisa, 2020).

Open Cheating was also initiated by the learners themselves as noted by *GMuneswa*: *Please anyone who is willing to help me with assignment 2 SEPT1501 … I can't take it anymore* (GMuneswa, 2020). And, again:

Please help. I am confused. I don't know how to go about with assignments. I have all the data but the assignments have no guide except for the long paper. There is no number of pages, specified citation and I am being referred to the tutorial letter which I have not received...Please I am in issues here help out please.. My email address is. (OPunisa, 2020)

7.8.2.9 Covid-19 Effects on Open Education

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be minimised. The consequences of the brutal transition from face-to-face (however limited it was before the pandemic) and distance to full online teaching and learning will be felt for a long time, even post-pandemic. It is therefore understandable that student reactions were shared on social media. For example, MKuneswa noted this:

> What about us Nursing students at Eswoni who are expected to attend clinicals in the wards and various health facilities across Eswatini this semester without proper protective gear (PPE). We feel very much exposed and the university is not saying or doing anything even when we highlight this to the respective channels. Is the degree worth our lives? Can Clinicals be postponed till the dust settles as well please. (MKuneswa, 2020)

In addition, BZuneswa stated: *Please tell the lecturers to stop giving us assignments without teaching us anything. We are still traumatised by this situation. We will get back to class and hurry as if we will die if we pause learning due to this pandemic* (BZuneswa, 2020). Equally, Covid-19 had other effects on the nature of examinations prepared for and administered to learners. In the name of observing social distance to limit the spread of Covid-19, e-examinations were advocated for. At Saniso, some learners found Open Examinations challenging, as noted by JPunisa:

> Some of you are complaining about online exams but can I just point out that exams are about to get worse. Guys the online exams I wrote were tough. There were no answers in the textbook or Google. It will be impossible to copy or find answers in the textbook or Google. (JPunisa, 2020)

Educational activities made possible in open educational environments are characterised by the opportunities for collaborative participation and creative exchange. Open Education, Open Content, and Open Source as a collective idea are often discussed as a means to liberation (Unsworth, 2004), empowerment, and democratisation (Vest, 2006). Equal access to current knowledge and a standing invitation to everyone to participate in advancing new ideas are common themes of the Open Education movement. Open Education is an attitude, a practice, a philosophy that goes beyond a mere approach to teaching and learning. Ideally, Open Education will bring about a more equitable access to course materials—and thus knowledge—through the sharing of lessons and materials with the wider community.

Bonk (2009) observes that the World is now Open with the aid of Web technology. Concomitantly, Institutions in developed countries are beginning to grapple with how the open education movement can bring vitality and relevance to curricula through new models of learner participation, and through cross-disciplinary and global perspectives. These institutions have begun to rethink their educational infrastructure in order to better support open education. However, the question remains how far African countries have come in implementing the basic principles of Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching at higher education levels.

There remain important obstacles. We note a few of them here (in line with the ones proposed by our study participants). The first one is that of negative attitudes towards sharing. However, studies have shown that there is an ongoing shift as some

"Academics are willing to release their material if they are (a) protected from litigation; (b) protected from criticism; (c) given an incentive to do so; and (d) furthering their discipline" (Lee in Iiyoshi & Kumar, 2008, p. 57). Additionally, literature indicates the lack of meaningful methods of assessing and validating what someone has learned, as well as the failure to integrate Open Education initiatives into other institutional approaches to enhance faculty development. Finally, and this echoes what was noted by our study participants, there is reluctance to participate in Open Education because of financial, sustainability, and preservation concerns (the generalised idea that "open" means "free" is definitely a contributing factor to the continued existence of these concerns).

These points were not directly brought to the surface by our study participants, but they have a bearing on the issues raised. In the next section, we propose some recommendations.

7.9   Recommendations

1. There is a need to cultivate peer support structures within the Open Education space to maximise social capital within the Open Teaching and Open Learning processes.
2. There is a need for free data bundles to assist with online learning seeing that its cost serves as a barrier to effective use of online Open Education Resources and broader acceptance of Open Education.
3. While the cost of Open Education was noted to be high in the targeted universities, more generalised application of Open Educational Resources is recommended to free students from the expense and instructors from the restrictions of commercial materials.
4. In view of the potential negative effects on ICTs users such as students and teaching staff, there is a need to embed ergonometric principles in the engineering of ICT products, processes and systems, and in the design of computer workstations in schools, colleges and universities. This is a sure way of averting potential health challenges.
5. Considering the challenges associated with poor Internet infrastructure and limited ICT skills, there is a need to give students a choice whether to write examinations online or at a physical venue. Open Education should go hand in hand with the principle of flexibility.

7.10   Conclusion

Open Education is an attitude, a practice, a philosophy that goes beyond a mere approach to teaching and learning. Ideally, Open Education will bring about a more equitable access to course materials through the sharing of lessons and materials

with the wider community. In this chapter, we set out to analyse feedback from staff and students shared with the world via social media (Facebook pages of selected universities). This had the main objective of finding out what some of the enablers and disablers of Open Education, Open Teaching and Open Learning are in the opinions of major educational stakeholders.

As enablers, the following themes stood out: peer and staff support. However, without adequate training, these types of support could easily turn into disablers. On the disabler side, our study participants noted negative attitudes towards Open Education, Open Learning and Open Teaching as well as poor communication. Both of these disablers can be counteracted with specific initiatives to enhance communication and interaction. An additional side effect is that of Open Cheating. Further research into this unlawful behaviour is warranted. Finally, we note the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here too, further research is needed to find out whether the long-term impact of the "forced" transition to online learning (we can call it emergency learning in many situations in the Southern African region) is a positive or a negative one.

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