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Open educational resources and academic libraries: reflections from Turkey

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Abstract

Information technologies facilitate the creation, sharing and access of scientific information; in addition, the widespread use of these technologies leads to the development of new applications and initiatives in the field of education. In recent years, the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement is realized by higher educational institutions, international organizations and other recognized public institutions and repositories. In the light of developments of the OER approaches, this study aims to demonstrate the current situations of OER initiatives, conducted by academic institutions in Turkey, in terms of content, technical infrastructure and applications and determine how academic libraries contribute to these initiatives.

Keywords: Open educational resources, Academic libraries, Turkey ;

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1. Introduction

Of late, the “Open Educational Resources” initiative has drawn academic institutions’ attention. Making digital learning materials accessible for the public freely through internet is becoming widespread around the world.

Conceptually, OER can be described by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO [1] as “teaching, learning or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution”. According to The

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Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD [2], OER can be defined as “digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research”. From these descriptions, it can be concluded that OER offer a free learning environment in which individuals can learn on their own and benefit from OER.

With the help of the project named “OpenCourseWare (OCW) launched by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2000. Many projects and consortia which enable access to course materials have been developed. In Turkey, the first initiative as regards OER is “Turkish OpenCourseWare Consortium” attempted by The Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) in 2007. In the consortium, it was aimed to present course contents including curriculum, notes and presentations (powerpoint, video, animations, etc.) of the course, sample examination and its solutions, sample assignment and its solutions, projects and applications and additional reading lists via web-based content management system in a free and standard way [3]. It is remarked that there were 65 universities attending the consortium in 2010, but merely five of them had active participations [4]. However, today this number has been made 13.

All OER projects and consortia can be regarded as a considerably effective means of lifelong learning for each individual and a connection between formal, non-formal and informal learning. According to Yılmaz [5], OER have not only been one of the significant ways to reach information sources and course materials but also an efficient tool to disseminate information among higher educational institutions, particularly in the past decade.

Although technology and online innovations have settled in educational life, libraries continue its significant duties as the main headquarter for information resources. Most of educational content is available online; however usage of the libraries is common in scholarly environments. The trustworthy characteristic of the libraries keeps their reputation and makes them host for all information resources, including in OER.

2. Literature Review

The role of the academic libraries is an invaluable part of the educational life in universities. Libraries contribute to students’ learning and faculties’ teaching and also support information literacy and lifelong learning [6]. Libraries also play an important role for open and distance learning through facilitating distance study and research with its own electronic resources.

OER and libraries are relevant in many aspects; OER are fit into library hosting since it is one the current efficacious information resources. “OER are a logical extension of what the library community supports in the open access movement, and underscore the need for the larger playing field on which scholarly communication takes place to be made more equitable” [7].

Libraries are well positioned to support OER production and publication operations and advantages of libraries are quite broad for OER. Libraries are important for OER in two perspectives; “Infrastructure” and “Relationship”. Klymeer, Kleinman and Hanss explain “Infrastructure” as “...search and discovery, copyright, expertise, data storage, metadata and indexing and institutional repositories and preservation.” The “Relationship” which is another advantage of library for OER is also acknowledged by authors as locations of the libraries in the campus, outreach and education, curriculum development, instructional support. In the same paper, researchers present a case study as entitled OER and the Library at the University of Michigan. According to the study, several collaborations are underway between OER movement and university library. OER and library are integrated in scope of copyright, preservation and student outreach [8].

Robertson states that [9] libraries can play a key role for maintaining and sustaining of OER initiatives and Libraries can offer advice to institutions, academic staff and students as they engage with OER, especially in some areas such as: “Metadata and resource description, information management and resource dissemination, digital or information literacy (funding and evaluating OER), subject based guides to finding resources, managing Intellectual Property Rights and promoting appropriate open licensing”. The survey towards academic libraries conducted by Robertson has demonstrated that the “library supports OER initiatives as an organization” and “the library supports the use of OER in so much as it supports the use of any inline resources.” Moreover “librarians support the use of OER in so much as it supports the use of any online resources.” The author also emphasized on Digital Literacy as a way that libraries might be involved in OER by supporting students in selecting and evaluating OER.

Recently, academic libraries have joined the supporting of OER in higher education institutions. Pryde [10],

pointed out that OER have a potential in libraries. The author gives Harvard Open Collection Development as an example of cooperated initiative for OER and libraries. "Harvard Open Collection Development is part of Harvard Libraries and Museums which linked grouping of digitized materials that are free to use for anyone". Furthermore, it is emphasized that an organization is necessary for library-wide OER system such as International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) which will be in charge of the planning and publicizing of OER initiatives. This initiative may include "instruction materials and educational tutorials that might be presented in the library part of regular OER initiative or repository".

There are many bases for cooperation of libraries and OER, "...but as the range of digitally available materials increases, and in particular as the range of OER increase libraries have an opportunity to capitalize on their already important role in the student's studies, the academic's professional development, and institution's public portfolio" [11].

3. Methodology

This study aims to demonstrate the current situations of OER initiatives, conducted by universities in Turkey, in terms of content, technical infrastructure and applications and find out how academic libraries contribute to these initiatives. The focus group of this study includes 13 universities in Turkey with OER. The descriptive model was used and the findings were gathered and obtained through content analysis and web based checklist. Related research data were assessed via Predictive Analytics Software (PASW).

4. Findings

In this study, thirteen universities were analyzed regarding their OER initiatives which were registered to Turkish Academy of Science; in terms of content types, course topics, disciplines, access points, software and relations with libraries. The findings show that, there are 471 courses offered by thirteen universities. Distribution of OER that are offered by universities is shown in Figure 1.

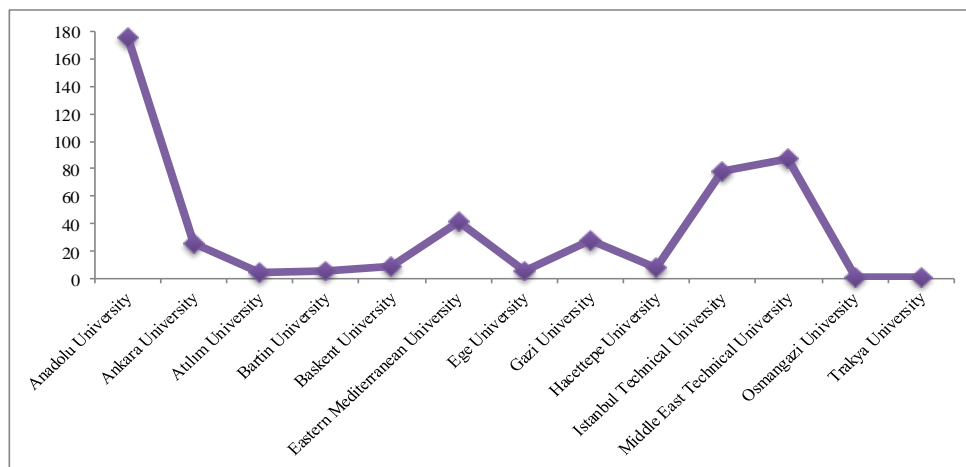


Fig. 1. Distribution of OER by Universities

As it is seen in the Figure 1, seven of the fourteen universities offer less than 20 courses as OER. According to Figure 1, Anadolu University has the highest rank by its 176 OER, Middle East Technical University and Istanbul Technical University are in the second and third places in terms of number of OER. It can be also said that some of the Turkish universities have just started OER initiatives, in terms of technical infrastructure and they are developing OER contents even some of the universities have already developed their OER infrastructures and courseware.

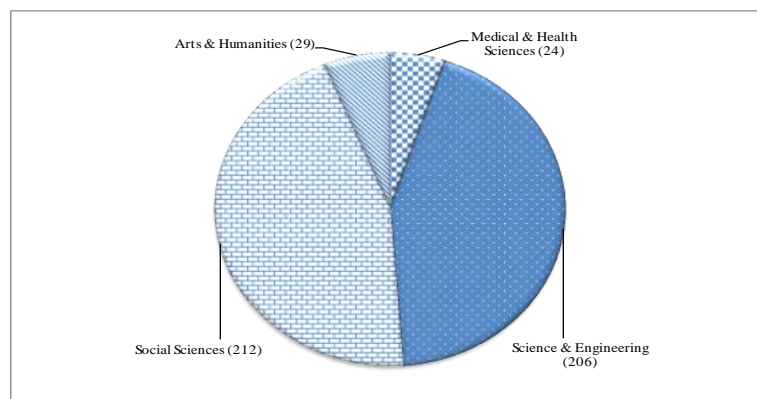


Fig. 2. OER Contents by Disciplines

Figure 2 displays that, OER that are offered by Turkish universities are mostly about Social Sciences (212) and Science & Engineering (206) disciplines. It is also pointed out in the figure 2 that Arts & Humanities (29) and Medical & Health Sciences (24) disciplines are offered less than other disciplines. According findings, it was obtained in our analyses that only three universities provide multimedia based content. Access points and accessibility of OER programs were also analyzed in this research. According to the findings, eight universities provide free access to OER, three universities provide some of the content free and some of them apply password control. Only two universities have fully restricted with password OER programs. In the light of these findings models that were determined by universities were tried to measure according to information on their web sites. Analyses reveal that five of the universities provide OER for lifelong learning of individuals who interested in and field offered by university. On the other hand while three universities determined their OER model as controlled OER, four of them use lifelong learning and controlled OER models together. One university has only one OER with an insufficient course number to determine its model.

The findings about copyright issues was shown that ten universities use Creative Common license for OER and three universities do not have any acknowledgment about copyright or license information about their OER applications. In terms of software that are used in OER programs in Turkish universities, analyses reveal that seven of thirteen universities preferred their portals; while six universities use learning and content management systems especially Moodle.

Content language is another important topic for OER; in this study language of OER contents were analyzed. The findings about language used in OER contents discover that most of the contents are in Turkish (354 courses) while 117 contents are in English. Some contents are in English in two universities. These are Istanbul Technical University (9 courses) and Middle East Technical University (67 courses). Only whole OER contents are in English in Eastern Mediterranean University (41 courses).

Libraries have vital roles in terms of providing access to OER. According to analysis only one OER program has a link to library web site. There is no links in library websites about OER programs in Turkish universities.

5. Conclusion

The outcomes of the research are as follows:

- Most of the universities in Turkey have very few OER contents. While some universities (eg; Anadolu University, Middle East Technical University and Istanbul Technical University) successfully carry out necessary structures considering OER as a pioneer, other universities have just started these structures.
- More content is produced in the disciplines of social sciences, science and engineering.
- The language of the content is predominantly Turkish.
- Universities usually present free access to the content and adopted a model which facilitate lifelong learning of individuals. In addition, most of the universities tend to be flexible and sharing on copyright

using Creative Commons licenses.

- OER initiatives at universities are not integrated with library systems and services.

As a consequence of these results, it can be stated that OER movement at universities in Turkey is rather a new concept and this movement has improved independently from libraries and there is no library initiatives in this regard.

OER, as new controlled information resources, provide great opportunities for an increase in knowledge dissemination in accordance with the educational purposes of universities. It is vitally significant and essential for libraries, the main supporter of educational activities at universities with their information resources, to participate directly in OER initiatives and revise their services and collections in the scope of OER.

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