

## **Exploring the institutional OER policy landscape in South Africa: dominant discourses and assumptions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A number of universities in South Africa are sharing teaching materials online making them freely available as Open Educational Resources (OER). The open sharing of teaching materials has been coupled with a number of institutional policy initiatives. This paper seeks to explore the institutional policy landscape of OER in South Africa in order to first understand the discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies and second, to critique and problematize the major discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as a tool for identifying dominant discourses in OER. Findings show that OER policies in public universities in South Africa are underpinned by three dominant discourses on access, collaboration and transformation. The extent to which OER can democratise access to education and redress socio-historic inequalities in the provision of educational resources is not guaranteed. Some scholars argue that OER could in some contexts perpetuate inequalities if the same barriers of accessing education in a traditional classroom have not been dealt with. OER policies are written as optimistic accounts on how to publish OER but they do not do a good job in encouraging reuse.

**Keywords:** *OER policy; open content; discourse; Open Educational Resources; critical discourse analysis.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Open Educational Resources (OER) are educational resources that are freely available for use by educators and learners, without an accompanying need to pay royalties or licence fees (Butcher et al., 2011). The provision of OER supports strategies of bringing down the economic costs of teaching and learning materials in resource constrained contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa (Babini, 2011; Glennie et al, 2012). OER grants permissions for the user to enjoy using the resource in a variety of ways, such as adaptation, translation, remixing, reuse and redistribution for non-commercial purposes, or otherwise, depending on the licence. Given the fact that OER are available free of charge (gratis) and openly licenced (libre), they are often presented as resources with obvious educational benefits that cannot be questioned.

Institutions have their own varied reasons and motives for initiating OER programmes. One common discourse is that OER hold the potential to democratise access to formal and informal education by allowing anyone from anywhere, anytime to access learning content and courses at a lesser cost (Glennie et al, 2012; McGreal, Miao and Mishra 2016; Rolfe, 2017). The open provision of teaching and learning resources in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has become an urgent policy imperative that seeks to redress the inequalities of the past and to increase participation in higher education. The Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities was introduced in 2014, while the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper was introduced in 2016.

Despite the considerable potential of OER to improve education and expand its reach, dominant discourses in OER have been criticised for carrying some ideological claims and assumptions that could possibly impede actual practice (dos Santos, 2008; Babini, 2011). Some issues are taken for

granted when postulating the idea of OER, that neglect the differences in local contexts in which OER are supplied or accessed (Babini, 2011). When discussing OER, technology is an actor which coexists with opening access (Valetsianos and Kimmons, 2012). As computers and other mobile devices have become more widely accessible in developing countries, easy access to online content is becoming ubiquitous. However, continuous Internet access and connectivity is still a challenge for OER users in Africa (Lekopanye, Tladi and Seretse, 2018), hence the need to download OER is still a significant concern (McGreal, Miao and Mishra, 2016). Whilst downloading OER requires Internet access, the downloaded content can be stored on mobile devices or computers and accessed offline.

Whilst OER have been presented as education equalisers, given their ability to transcend time and place barriers, a concern for most critics has been that open systems can reinforce inequalities (Bates, 2016; Baijnath, 2018; Almeida, 2017). Beyond issues of bandwidth and connectivity which are broadly acknowledged in most national policy documents in South Africa, OER can reinforce inequalities when the same barriers for participation that affected the traditional classroom are not removed (Baijnath, 2018). Such barriers that affected participation in the traditional classroom include: the learners' educational qualifications, geographical location, socio-economic disadvantage, institutional support in learning, other dispositional challenges of learners and the tendency to drop out of courses (Cannell, 2017; Lane and van Dorp, 2011).

## **PROBLEM INVESTIGATED**

This paper explores the institutional policy landscape of OER to achieve the following: a) understand the discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies in South Africa; and b) critique and problematize the major discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies in South Africa. It is important to uncover and critique the dominant discourses behind the drive for OER because OER is a new concept in South Africa and the conceptualisation of OER is critical to its success. Policy discourses are "institutionalised languages used to frame beliefs around issues of everyday importance" (Mattheis, 2017, p.7). Institutions draw on ideas that are shaping the field and consequently these discourses shape them (dos Santos, 2008, p.9). It is important to point to some of these discourses as they can affect practice in various ways (Mattheis, 2017). They can be adopted as 1) new ways of interacting; 2) new ways of being or identities; and 3) new ways of physically organizing spaces in teaching and learning (Fairclough, 2013).

It is rare to come across studies that try to problematize and critique the provision of OER, especially in the education field that is mostly driven by a desire to exchange knowledge (Bayne, Knox and Ross, 2015). Some scholars have lamented the lack of critical approaches to open education research (dos Santos, 2008; Cronin, 2017). "Critical perspectives should be aimed at understanding ... how particular claims of open access to educational resources influence policy and manifest in practice" (Bayne, Knox and Ross, 2015, p.247). No studies have been done on institutional OER policies in South Africa. Previous studies in HEIs in South Africa have analysed intellectual property policies (ROER4D, 2017; Cox and Trotter, 2016; Trotter, 2016). Most universities in South Africa seem to lack any strategic intent to openly share their teaching and learning resources (ROER4D, 2017, p.4). In North America, OER policies have been criticised for focusing on open textbooks which are only one example of OER. We note that "... The knowledge on effective OER policies and practices remains scarce" (Tang, 2016, p.viii).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This paper first surveys the institutional OER policy landscape in South Africa. Second, it engages with the dominant discourses of OER. Third, it discusses the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology and conceptual framework in critical policy analysis. Fourth, it discusses the sample of policies and the findings of the study.

## OER policies

The first evidence of policy support for OER at the institutional level in South Africa was seen from the University of Western Cape's (UWC) *Free Content and Open Courseware Strategy* in October 2005, pioneered by Derek Keats, who also shared his journey on OER (see Keats, 2009). Since then there has been some considerable efforts by other universities to formulate OER policies. The University of Witwatersrand formulated *An enabling strategy for Free and Open Educational Resources* in 2011. In 2012 The University of South Africa (UNISA) launched an OER initiative which included developing a UNISA OER Strategy. In 2014 the University of Cape Town (UCT) formulated the *UCT Open Access Policy*, with OER embedded in this policy. Similarly Nelson Mandela University (NMU) also has an Open Access Policy in draft form that embeds OER. In March, 2018 North West University (NWU) passed *the North West University Open Educational Resources Declaration*. Table 1 shows four categories of OER policy types in public universities in South Africa.

**Table 1:** Institutional OER policy types in public universities in South Africa

OER Policy type	Description
1. OER specific policies	Covering only teaching materials
2. OER embedded in an open access policy	Open access policies typically cover the publishing of research outputs in repositories and open access journals, also known as 'green and gold policies' (see Abadal, 2013)
3. OER strategies	Action plans detailing procedures to be taken to achieve long term plans
4. OER statements and declarations	Formal announcements or pronouncements on the plans and intentions of the institution concerning OER

## DOMINANT DISCOURSES OF OER

The literature identifies four dominant discourses of OER namely: 1. Access 2. Collaboration 3. Empowerment and 4. Transformation discourses (Glennie et al., 2012, p.4; dos Santos, 2008; Butcher et al., 2014; Weller, 2017). There are no boundaries that delineate a discourse since all discourses are constituted by other discourses, a concept that Fairclough (1993, p.138) refers to as 'interdiscursivity'. This discussion explores other discourses that share an interdiscursive relationship with the dominant discourses.

### Access discourses

OER are often presented as a solution to overcome barriers in accessing education and to provide opportunities for people distributed by geography and income to become connected to learning (Rolfe, 2017; Edwards, 2015, p.252). Much of the urge to create and use OER in higher education has been driven by instrumental desires to overcome existing deficits in accessing scholarly teaching materials in resource constrained contexts (Glennie et al., 2012, p.4). Such discourses are intertwined with expressions of social inclusion, equity and of late social justice and the assumption that the internet and higher education are in the business of fixing social disparities like the unequal access to education (Almeida, 2017). However, access to resources alone is not enough to fully realise the potential of openness in higher education (Weller, 2017). When access is measured by the download rates of OER this can be a good sign to gauge interest but it is not adequate information to judge how much learning actually took place and to gauge interest in the adoption and reuse of OER (Panke and Seufert, 2013). Critical thoughts should consider such

issues as access to the necessary hardware, software, bandwidth, the quality of information and knowledge opened given that not all education is good education, what is learnt rather than what is accessible (Edwards, 2015).

### **Collaboration discourses**

Emerging international policy agendas on education are shifting from the idea of simply providing access to content, towards the notion of creating open participatory learning ecosystems, which are sustained through collaboration (Towey, et. al., 2017; Alevizou, Wilson and McAndrew, 2010; dos Santos, 2008). Collaboration happens between countries, institutions, learners and the OER provider or between the learners themselves. Behind the discourse of collaboration are notions of community and participation. One criticism laid against the dominance of collaborative discourses in OER is that “most OER initiatives still pursue it from a position of dominance for example it is the provider offering the content to the user; it is the most knowledgeable institution offering guidelines to the novice ones” (dos Santos, 2008, p.5). Discourses on collaboration can be identified using words like ‘share’. Collaboration discourses share an interdiscursive relationship with institutional discourses, discourses on widening participation, social inclusion and globalisation. Institutional discourses believe that through collaboration, universities will be able to widen participation, be socially inclusive and be part of the globalised world, which will raise the institutional profiles (dos Santos, 2008).

### **Empowerment discourses**

Conversations on empowerment are hinged on the fact that students can create their own learning resources by reusing and remixing content accessed from other authors. However, some empowerment discourses in OER have been used in a single-sided perspective, where the provider offers the user what they think is needed for them to be part of the knowledge society (dos Santos, 2008). Discourses on open provision have been criticised for lacking regionalisation as most content initiatives using ICTs want to push for locals to acquire content rather than draw local content from local people. Although some initiatives do open up opportunities for the users to create and publish their own content, it is not the dominant discourse in the movement, and is not reflected in the structure of most websites (dos Santos, 2008). Most OER initiatives are accessed on web 1.0 principles which simply make information available rather than web 2.0 or 3.0 principles that enable the joint construction and dissemination of knowledge and information (dos Santos, 2008).

### **Transformation discourses**

The potential of OER to contribute to the transformation of teaching and learning has been posited by several OER proponents (Butcher et al., 2014; Weller, 2014). Transformation discourses are based on the belief that OER can transform conventional forms of teaching that relied on teacher-student hierarchies (Bayne, Knox and Ross, 2015, p.247). OER promote pedagogy of openness where social learning applications, like blogs, chats, discussion forums, wikis and group assignments are used by learners to contribute simultaneously (Weller, 2014). This belief is supported by an assumption that students fall into a universal category of rational, self-directed and highly motivated individuals (Bayne, Knox and Ross 2015, p.247). The discourse fails to engage with the de-emphasis of teacher contact and problematic forms of student isolation (Bayne, Knox and Ross 2015, p.247). In considering open education there can be limitations inherent in the basic educational skill levels that the students bring with them to open education. Others have low technological skill sets, reading and writing skills that impede their learning and engagement in open systems of learning (Lane and van Dorp, 2011). The information in Table 2 below summarises the dominant discourses on OER in the literature, their claims and assumptions and how they relate to other discourses in the OER field.

**Table 2:** Dominant discourses in OER, claims and associated discourses

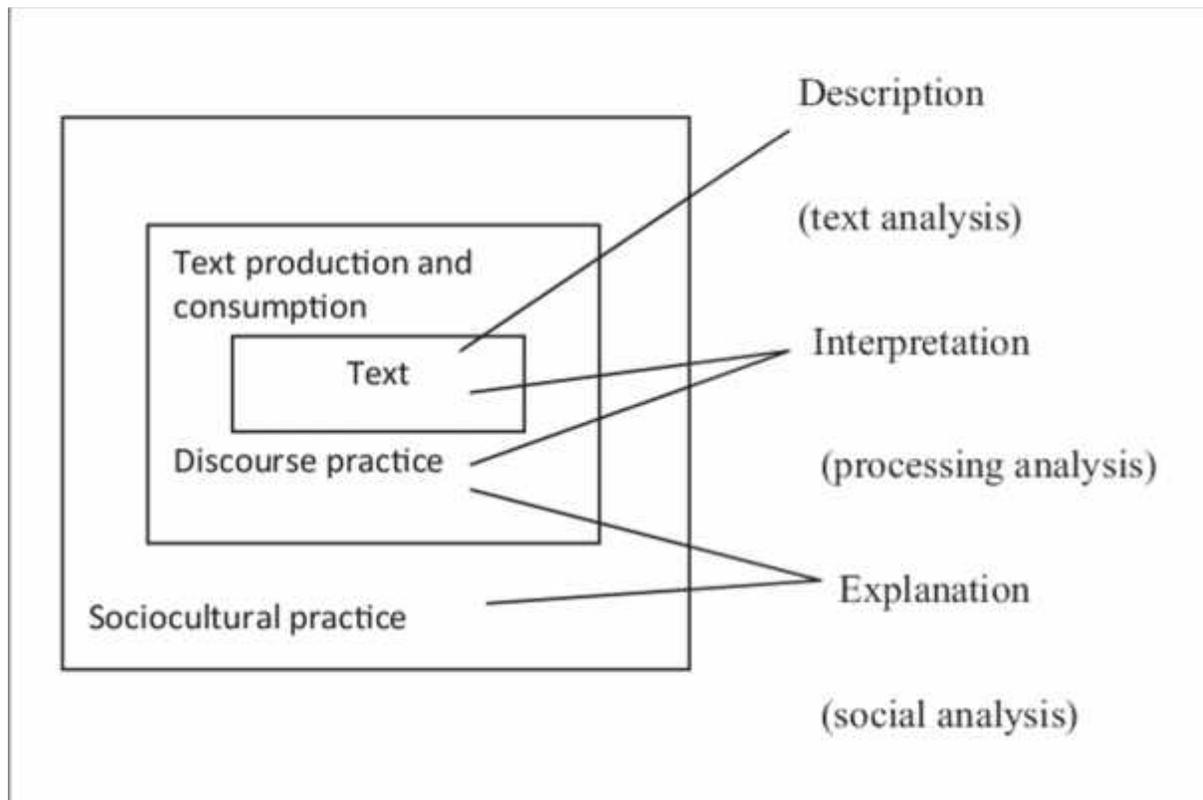
Dominant discourses in OER	Claims associated with the discourse	Interdiscursivity of discourses
1. Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>) OER can overcome barriers to educational engagement posed by geography and socio-economic disadvantage (Edwards, 2015, p.252).</li> <li>) OER present a way to overcome deficits in educational resource provision, especially in disadvantaged contexts (Glennie et.al, 2012)</li> <li>) Access to educational resources could reduce inequalities and achieve equity in educational provision</li> <li>) OER are public goods that can overcome social ills like poverty and inequality (Glennie et.al, 2012)</li> </ul>	Inequality Equity Social justice Social inclusion Public good
2. Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>) Sharing knowledge and expertise are ways to collaborate with peers in a given community (dos Santos, 2008)</li> <li>) Collaboration raises the institutional profile and increases visibility</li> <li>) Collaboration leads to wider participation in a global knowledge society</li> </ul>	Institutional discourse Widening participation & Globalisation discourses (dos Santos, 2008)
3. Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>) How the user can use the website to create relevant content for a certain community of practice.</li> </ul>	Development Knowledge production
4. Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>) OER have the potential of horizontalising educational hierarchies of teacher and learner and transforming pedagogy.</li> <li>) Such notions assume an autonomous student, whose independent activity requires instantly and universally accessible material, anytime admittance and teachers who merely facilitate the process (Bayne, Knox and Ross, 2015, p. 247)</li> </ul>	Self-directed learning Lifelong learning Coproduction of knowledge Resource based learning

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A qualitative, exploratory and critical approach to policy analysis was employed in this paper. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as a method to analyse the policies and identify dominant discourses.

### Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Norman Fairclough's CDA (Fairclough, 2001) of a communicative interaction is used in this study to understand the discourses informing the policies and how they relate to social practice context.



\*initially published by Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995)

**Figure 1:** A framework for CDA of a communicative event (Fairclough, 2001)

The analysis of OER policies in this paper consisted of 3 inter-related processes of analysis.

1. A description of the text
2. An interpretation of the relationship between the text and interaction (discourse)
3. An explanation of the relationship between the interaction (discourse) and the social context (Fairclough 2001)

CDA requires an analysis of the relationship between texts, interactions and contexts. It also enables the analyst to find possible ideologies, assumptions as well as values (what is considered to be important), within the given text (Fairclough, 2001a). CDA seeks to show how ideological presuppositions are hidden underneath the surface structures of language choices in text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). There is no typical CDA way of analysing a policy.

### **Sample for policy analysis**

A purposive sampling method was used to select policies choosing only policies on the free and open provision of teaching resources. A desk review of OER policies was conducted, coupled with online searches and phone calls to various universities. The search yielded 6 policies from across the 26 public universities in South Africa. Of the 6 policies, 4 were chosen and two excluded (the

Nelson Mandela University) on the basis that it is still an incomplete draft and the UNISA OER strategy which could not be accessed online. The 4 policies chosen are represented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Sample for Analysis of Institutional OER Policies in HEIs in South Africa

Institution	Document	Policy Type	Year	Link
1. University of Western Cape	A free content and free and open courseware implementation strategy for the University of Western Cape	OER Specific Policy	2004	<a href="https://www.oerafrica.org/sites/default/files/UWC_FreeContentPolicy-0.4.pdf">https://www.oerafrica.org/sites/default/files/UWC_FreeContentPolicy-0.4.pdf</a>
2. University of Cape town	UCT Open access Policy UCT OER policy guidelines	OER Embedded in OA policy	June 2014	<a href="http://www.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/328/about/policies/Policy_Open_Access_2016.pdf">http://www.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/328/about/policies/Policy_Open_Access_2016.pdf</a>
3. University of Witwatersrand	An enabling strategy for Free and Open Educational Resources at the University of Witwatersrand	OER Strategy	2011	<a href="http://libguides.wits.ac.za/ld.php?content_id=17311115">http://libguides.wits.ac.za/ld.php?content_id=17311115</a>
4. North West University	North West University Open Educational Resources Declaration	OER Statements & Declaration	March 2018	<a href="http://news.nwu.ac.za/sites/news.nwu.ac.za/files/files/Robert.Balfour/2018.OE-Declaration.14March.pdf">http://news.nwu.ac.za/sites/news.nwu.ac.za/files/files/Robert.Balfour/2018.OE-Declaration.14March.pdf</a>

## ANALYSIS

The analysis of the policies was done in four stages:

1. Policies were read through to understand the issues covered.
2. A coding framework was developed from the literature on the dominant discourses in OER as espoused in Table 2
3. Dominant discourses embedded in OER policies were searched for using Atlas Ti.
4. The subsequent sub-themes under each discourse were identified.

## FINDINGS

Three dominant discourses shaping OER policies emerged from our analysis namely, access collaboration and transformation discourses.

### Access Discourses

The dominant discourses in the policies focused on improving access to higher education and promoting equitable access to appropriate and relevant learning resources, hence supporting social inclusion. Findings revealed that institutional OER policies have been proposed against the backdrop of increasing access to scholarly knowledge, given the rising costs of library materials:

By adopting such a policy, the university seeks to manage the rising costs of library materials and access to scholarly knowledge (UCT, 2014)

The NWU acknowledges that OER cannot always replace tried and tested academic text books and will sometimes be used in addition to these trusted resources. OER is essential to strengthen a knowledge economy and to enhance access to a diverse teaching and learning materials offering of high quality (NWU, 2018, p.3)

OER are seen in the context of overcoming limitations in accessing scholarly resources hence the focus on creation and publication of OER to overcome these deficits or inequalities (Glennie et al, 2012). The dominance of using instrumental and deficit discourses as a basis for framing policy decisions results in OER policies that focus more on the creation and publication of OER to overcome deficits in accessing scholarly educational resources. Findings show that OER policies are written as optimistic accounts on how to publish OER, but fail to engage with practical implications of use and reuse. Such policies will inform good practice in creation but fail to encourage academics to reuse teaching materials created by others. Some studies report the reluctance of faculty to use OER created by others (De Hart, Yurisha and Archer, 2015).

Findings show that access discourses in the provision of OER, are intersected with equity, social justice and political discourses of freedom and liberty in accessing scholarly knowledge. These discourses are situated in the history and purposes of teaching and learning in a South African cultural setting. Such imperatives are evident in views such as:

Free and open educational resources at the University of Western Cape are deeply rooted in our institutional culture, stemming from the role the university played in the struggle for political freedom in South Africa (Keats 2009, p.47).

The notion that OER bring about freedom in accessing scholarly teaching and learning materials is evident in the UWC policy. The policy identifies the rights to reuse, remix and redistribute OER as “freedoms”. Furthermore, the policy describes open as ‘liberty’.

Keats (2009, p.47) avers that “the focus at the UWC was on the benefits of freedom that include social justice, rather than solely on the utility benefits, hence the continued use of the term freedom within the conceptualisation and the choice of licences consistent with that concept”. It is not certain however, how liberatory aims can be translated into successful educational outcomes (Glennie et al, 2012). Access discourses driving OER policies underscore significant challenges facing the South African Higher Education context in exercising freedom to access OER, such as the students’ level of preparedness to learn autonomously in open contexts.

There is not much critical reflection in institutional OER policies on what could constrain freedom in openly sharing teaching resources. One fundamental constraint imminent in most universities in South Africa is that of Dramatic Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO) payments, which is a barrier to sharing copyrighted material as OER “DALRO permissions do not allow the making of copyrighted material available through open courseware although they may, subject to legal requirements, be made available in protected areas on the e-learning server” (UWC 2004). The FOER<sup>1</sup> Strategy at Wits point out that, “one of the most burdensome aspects of publishing FOER is to ensure that none of the intended material falls under someone else’s full copyright ... for

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<sup>1</sup> Free Open Educational Resources

example images or diagrams that were copied from a website into lecture presentation slides” (Wits, 2011, p.9).

### **Public good discourses**

The literature notes that “OERs have an ideological appeal being mostly presented as self-evident social goods that can unproblematically address social ills such as poverty and inequality” (Glennie et al, 2000, p.7). Discourses that present OER as public goods were observed in the UWC strategy that believes that OER can provide relief in terms of their capacity to reach large classes.

The NWU believes that through openly sharing high quality teaching and learning resources...the notion of education as a public good, rather than just a private benefit, can be put into action, and over time with a sizable reduction in costs and relief for capacity constraints (NWU, 2018).

There is a dominant line of thought in most of the policies, presented with much intensity suggesting that OER will help to solve some of the social ills in society contributing to social and economic development.

OER is essential to strengthen a knowledge economy and to enhance access to a diverse range of teaching and learning materials of high quality (NWU, 2018, p.3).

By adopting this policy the university actively seeks to contribute their academic resources to social and economic development (UCT, 2014).

Glennie et al (2012, p.7) argue that there is a lack of critical perspectives on OER since OER is presented as a self-evident social good that can unproblematically resolve social ills like poverty and inequality. There is little evidence of intellectual opinions that critique OER, perhaps this is because OER has no clear disciplinary home and it is usually from such a base that the most informed critiques would emerge (Glennie et al, 2012).

### **Inequality discourses**

The discourse on inequality in terms of availability of OER resources in the Global South and the West is presented in a salient but persistent way in most policies. The UCT policy states that

the widespread availability of open education resources, open content, open courses, etc. from the Global North is both an opportunity and a concern as there is an equally urgent need for local teaching and learning resources to be made freely available online (UCT, 2014).

In the same vein, the NWU declaration states that “the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts must be encouraged” (NWU, 2018). The literature notes that in-order to ensure an equal representation of content from the North and South there is need to address basic social inequalities and the huge digital divide between those who have access to technological resources and know-how and those who do not (Dos Santos, 2008). Failure to do this will result in the OER movement being used as a way of perpetuating inequalities in education, whilst strong positive claims are being made of OER being democratic equalisers (Bates, 2016). The discourse of overcoming inequalities in terms of creation and availability of OER from Africa should be accompanied by critical thought on how to obtain or generate funding for this purpose (Lekopanye, Tladi and Seretse, 2018; McGreal, Miao and Mishra, 2016). It is possible that universities in the South may not attract as much funding as Western universities that have been at the vanguard of the movement and have greater appeal to potential students, that most universities in the global south do not enjoy (Glennie et al, 2012).

### **Collaboration discourses**

The issue of collaboration is clearly captured in UCT's Open Access Policy, which promotes "the sharing of knowledge and the creation of open education resources" (UCT, 2014, p.3). The policy does not mandate that academics share their teaching and learning materials as OER, but simply encourages them to do so (Cox and Trotter, 2016). Collaboration discourses were supported by words such as "share", "communities of practice", "community", "part of the movement", "groupings". The North West University through its OER policy seeks to "establish communities of practice within faculties, schools and support departments to facilitate the effective creation, adoption, adaptation and integration of OER" (NWU, 2018, p.3). The NWU policy foregrounds the idea of engaging as networks.

Collaboration discourses were also evident in the use of certain words like 'learning ecosystems' and 'learning communities', along with 'communities of practice'. Wits (2011) "believes that communities of practice are vital to the sustainability of FOER initiatives, and collaboration is essential to reap the benefits of global FOER initiatives". Whilst collaboration can ensure the cross pollination of diverse ideas, the idea that knowledge is used as a commodity to collaborate, suggests that the actors will not collaborate on an equal footing. When knowledge is the commodity used to collaborate, this insinuates issues of powerful and less powerful, knowledgeable and less knowledgeable (dos Santos, 2008). It is a discursive pattern that structures institutions in terms of competition (the good ones being those with good profiles, especially as reflected in measurable outcomes of regional content and international content). Talking about content from the North and South also insinuates power relations. Discourses of collaboration compete with arguments about competition.

### **Transformation discourses**

The discourse that OER will transform teaching and learning is also dominant in the NWU OER declaration that promotes the idea of self-directed learning and multimodal literacies. A UNESCO Research Chair for OER and Multimodal learning was established in 2018 at NWU (Olivier, 2018: online).

The research for this Chair will focus on multimodal learning (a blending of face-to-face and e-learning modalities) as well as the multi-literacies required for culturally appropriate and effective learning within an environment that is conducive to self-directed learning and Open Educational Resources (OER) (peer-reviewed shared online resources that include material, books, videos, lessons and even full courses) (Olivier, 2018).

The promotion of multimodal and self-directed learning has been identified as an important aspect in the NWU Teaching and Learning Strategy. Transformation discourses of OER subjugate the teacher's role in the learning environment or the presence of tutors to support learning. The extent to which OER can horizontalise educational hierarchies of teachers and learners and transform learning, depends on the capacity of learners to work autonomously, which is seldom considered in OER policy debates.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper explored the institutional policy landscape of OER to achieve the following: a) understand the discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies in South Africa; and b)

critique and problematize the major discourses and assumptions that underpin OER policies in South Africa. Findings from the analysis of OER policies revealed the dominance of three discourses in OER namely: 1. Access 2. Collaboration and 3. Transformation.

Access discourses driving OER policies underscore significant challenges faced by learners in exercising their freedom in accessing OER. Challenges such as lacking the ability to learn autonomously, the lack of knowledge about OER, the institutional support, or lack of it given to learners using OER, and variabilities in the socio-economic status of learners that could impede access to OER. Another finding is that OER policies frame OER as static content, hence the strong emphasis on how OER stakeholders should publish OER and less emphasis given to the use-reuse and remixing of content created by others. OER policies need to engage with issues of access to quality OER which has been shown to be a deterrent in OER adoption by academics who report the absence of quality OER that they can use to teach.

OER policies present OER as a social good that will resolve problems of inequality in accessing educational resources from Africa. However, such discourses need to be accompanied by critical thoughts on what could impede creation of OER in various African contexts, and what could prevent African scholars from using and remixing teaching resources created by others. Regulations such as DALRO pose an impediment to sharing of copyrighted materials as OER. It is possible that OER can perpetuate inequalities whilst claiming to be democratic. Beyond issues of connectivity and bandwidth, if the same cultural, social and material barriers to participation in learning in campus based programmes are not removed, OER may entrench inequalities. Such situational barriers as learners' educational experience and capacity to learn autonomously, disability, socio economic disadvantage and support or lack of it from the institution, lack of confidence, among other factors, need to be dealt with, to avoid perpetuating entrenched barriers to participation through OER.

Whilst collaboration discourses suggest an equal footing in the engagement, the fact that knowledge is being shared brings in issues of power as some actors may be more knowledgeable than others. Conversations about creating more content from the South should be accompanied by critical thought on how to obtain funding for that purpose.

The evidence gathered here demonstrates the need for more critical discourses in OER policies. The authors recommend this paper to serve as the start of renewed efforts to look for better ways of philosophising and presenting the academic discourse about OER and its related practices in HEIs. Such a discussion could allow for critical reflection on the part of educators and policymakers that will lead to more evidence based policymaking rather than policies driven by rhetoric and uncritical claims of OER. We recommend that further research be conducted to understand whose interests lie in OER policies.

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### List of abbreviations

OER	Open Educational Resources
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ROER4D	Research on Educational Resources for Development
UWC	University of Western Cape
UNISA	University of South Africa

NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NWU	North West University
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
UCT	University of Cape Town
UWC	University of Western Cape
DALRO	Dramatic Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation
FOER	Free Open Educational Resources

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