

Open Education as a continuation of Open Science in Finnish higher education sector

In Finland, several national steps have been taken especially during the last ten years to promote Open Science. Supporting an open society, the Open Science Policies detailed in the work-in-progress Declaration for Open Science and Research 2020-2025 now includes goals for open education (OE) and educational resources (OER).

This poster is based on a qualitative interview study carried out between April and September 2019, discussing the status and attitudes towards Open Science practices as well as open education and educational resources. The study was conducted by the “Open RDI, learning, and the innovation ecosystem of Finnish Universities of applied sciences” project, co-funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. The target group for the study was teachers (n=23) in nine different universities of applied sciences. The inclusion criterium for the interviewed teachers was that they had experience on final thesis tutoring, teaching research methods and/or RDI projects. The interviews were based on a theme frame, allowing questions to extend and broaden the initial answers. Based on the results, the interviewed teachers’ knowledge of OER was limited.

At the time of the study, licensing of one’s own educational material was unfamiliar for over half of the teachers, who stated they could not tutor students in this topic. Product protection and intellectual property rights (IPR) was even more unknown to the respondents. The need for support was obvious in Creative Commons licensing, sharing material that has been produced by multiple individuals, open data repositories, publishing one’s own material openly and the best sharing platforms.

Open education (OE) and sharing educational material seemed to be unfamiliar to most of the interviewees. Most respondents had neither shared nor utilized OER. However, it is possible to conclude that the concept of open learning material was not clear to the respondents. The material shared in closed learning environments like Moodle was also widely understood as open learning material.

After open discussions of the findings by the project, steps to increase awareness of OE and OER were taken. These actions included national-level training and workshops. Some higher education institutions reacted immediately by offering training in licensing and IPR. Additional steps have now been taken to facilitate the use of the Library of Open Educational Resources (aoe.fi) in publishing and sharing education material.

Although the study results appear one-sided, initial actions to fill in the discovered knowledge gaps have had a positive effect on this key target group of actors in promoting OE and OER. Teachers in higher education are in the primary position to facilitate openness and share know-how on open data and OER – therefore relevant further education should be considered especially for this group. However, teachers typically operate in high-pressure environments with little extra resources to spare to new initiatives outside their primary focus. Only when these initiatives add significant value to their operations on a personal level, educating teachers will have a real effect on students’ learning and thesis work, thus facilitating spreading open science approaches in the society as a whole.