Critical Review

Hyunju Kim

Ohio State University

March 21, 2013

Critical Review

According to UNESCO (2007), the world needs millions of teachers to realize the goal of the Education for All. In Sub Saharan Africa alone, four million new teachers are needed. In developing countries, the importance of teacher training is critical because teachers are the only reliable resources for education in such countries. Thus, teacher qualification particularly plays a significant role in students' success in poor countries. In this paper, two articles will be reviewed to discuss how to effectively support Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan African (TESSA) countries using Open Educational Resources (OERs). In both articles the term "template" is used as the authors classify how much or how deeply TESSA OER is integrated into the local lesson plans. Three types of models, or templates, are introduced: highly structured, loosely structured and guided use depending on depending on how the OERs will be utilized. The rationale behind the development of three different models was that this gives the teacher educators and teachers more distinct direction in how they can use the materials to meet their local needs.

For effective local use of OERs in teacher education, Wolfenden, Buckler, and Keraro (2012) emphasize the adaptation process of the OERs into local lessons according to the different regional situations. Underlining critical thinking ability to select and adapt the material, the authors deconstruct study units of the highly structured template to show what aspects should be localized and what should be kept within the template. The influence of external factors such as the attitudes and skills of lecturers are also discussed for the adaptation process. The purpose of this article is to empower local educators in Africa with the ability to select and modify given material from OERs. Thakrar, Zinn, and Wolfenden (2009) discuss three forms of OER integration - highly structured, loosely structured, and guided use templates- into teacher

education in Sub-Saharan African countries. This article provides a good amount of contextual

background for education in Africa including policy change in the history and diverse external

factors in distribution and integration of OERs within local educational systems. The importance

of collaboration of the TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) consortium is

discussed to support institutions in the development of learner-centered study models. Overall,

Wolfenden et al. (2012) offer applicable ways to utilize OERs by showing the modification

process of the given materials whereas the description of the use of OERs by Thakrar et al. (2009)

remains explanatory and less practical. However, Thakrar et al. (2009) provides comprehensive

views contrary to the limited perspectives of Wolfenden et al. (2012) by outlining external

success factors.

       With the use of OERs, Wolfenden et al. (2012) present applicable directions for users by

demonstrating the adaptation steps while Thakrar et al. (2009) simply explain three ways of

using OERs. Even though their discussion is limited to the highly structured template,

Wolfenden et al. (2012) analyze the adaptation process with examples and figures, and it helps

readers get focused, follow the adaptation process step by step, and learn how to use the given

resources as relevant teaching materials. On the contrary, even though Thakrar et al. (2009) help

readers clearly understand the three templates of OERs and picture how OERs can be actually

utilized in teacher education even in rural areas, it does not help readers make further application

of OERs.

       In terms of external factors for successful OER integration, Thakrar et al. (2009) deal

comprehensively with external factors in six areas: access, resource, support, cultural practices,

and sustainability whereas Wolfenden et al. (2012) discuss only educators as external factors. In

describing the issue, Thakrar et al. (2009) do not overlook small aspects such as time

consumption in locating and familiarizing resources, regular monitoring and follow-up reflective activities, and cultural considerations in decision making. This helps readers to realize how many factors are involved in the integration and dissemination of OERs for successful teacher education. However, the authors did not clarify some expressions. For example, if Thakrar et al. (2009) would have elaborated in explaining "maintaining momentum at the consortium level" in the sustainability part of the external factors, it would have been more helpful for readers to understand the sustainability as an external factor. On the contrary, Wolfenden et al. (2012) limit the external factors in OER integration to educators such as lecturers and participants in the adaptation process. Even though it does not provide wide and balanced views on other possible external factors, it is still insightful to learn how the cultural background, attitudes, and skills of the people involved in the adaptation process can affect the quality of teacher education.

Both articles are useful in understanding Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) and developing it with OERs. Since Thakrar et al. (2009) provide broader information about the OER with overall contextual knowledge, it would be more beneficial for novices in this field by giving them a good understanding of TESSA OERs. On the other hand, Wolfenden et al.(2012) would be found practical and useful with their thorough explanation on the adaptation process of OERs when users want to apply the learning into practice.

References

Thakrar, J., Zinn, D., & Wolfenden, F. (2009). Harnessing Open Educational Resources to the

Challenges of Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Review of

Research in Open and Distance Learning, 10,* 4.)

Wolfenden, F., Buckler, A., & Keraro, F. (2012). OER Adaptation and Reuse across

Cultural Contexts in Sub Saharan Africa: Lessons from TESSA (Teacher Education in

Sub Saharan Africa). *Journal of Interactive Media in Education.*