

THE PROBLEM OF USING OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE AS A LESS WIDESPREAD LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD

Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė

Laima Ruibytė

Rūta Adamonienė

Aušra Stepanovienė

Birutė Pranevičienė

Rasa Dobržinskienė

Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Abstract. *The demand to promote development of Open Educational Resources (OER) in less used languages is relevant all across Europe. Although numerous education resources are available today, their access in the Lithuanian language is very scarce.*

The aim of the article is to reveal the importance of OER in the Lithuanian language for the development of teachers' competences. This is crucial to assure the quality of teaching material by providing a possibility to disseminate innovations, to develop creativity and consistency as well as to share created teaching resources.

The article is based on scientific literature analysis and descriptive methods.

OER in Lithuanian are crucial to assuring the quality of teaching material by providing teachers a possibility to develop their competences, creativity, and consistency as well as to apply innovations and share the designed resources of teaching.

Keywords: *less used languages, Open Educational Resources, teachers' competences, teaching and learning quality.*

Introduction

The demand to promote the development of OER of less widespread languages is relevant not only in Lithuania but all over Europe. In Europe OER are supported by the European Commission regarding Open Education initiative to promote learning and teaching methods involving information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as their contents, and in principle improving OER access and permissibility. Although many of education resources are today easily accessible, in Lithuanian they are rather scarce. However, the first steps have already been undertaken. Guidelines of the Lithuanian language development in information technologies were designed in 2013-2014 in order to ensure well-rounded use of the Lithuanian language in a

digital field, to establish the status of the Lithuanian language in the information society, to protect the language from a so-called digital extinction and reduce isolation of Lithuanian-speaking community in a global knowledge society. These aims are expected to be realized by increasing resources and developing tendencies of a language. Guidelines were designed with regard to outcomes of implementing the programme of the Lithuanian language in the information society in 2009-2013 and state of technologies aimed at the Lithuanian language.

The guidelines were developed following the documents State development strategy “*Lithuania 2030*“, the Law on a National Language, Lithuanian Information Society Development Programme 2019, provisions of EU New Multilingual Fundamentals Strategy and European Digital Agenda “*2015.eu*“.

According to UNESCO, the use of one’s native language in formal education is an essential condition for a successful learning and mental development. Application of OER in the Lithuanian language would encourage teachers and learners to think creatively. It would contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning quality, emphasise the importance of teachers when developing and fostering learning/teaching resources.

The aim of the article is to discuss the importance of OER in the Lithuanian language in order to develop teachers’ competences. The objectives of the article are as follows: 1) to review Lithuanian and foreign authors’ scientific works related to OER 2) to outline possibilities of creating and disseminating OER in the Lithuanian language.

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Review of a scientific literature and legislation on OER

OER are defined as “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work” (Bradley & Vigmo, 2015). Globalisation of OER in the world has been known for a long time. However, the majority of OER is stored in most widespread languages. OER are scarce in rarely used languages and, thus, the aim of

LangOER project currently implemented by the European Union is not only to raise the problem but also encourage states of rarely used languages to pay more attention for creation of OER. Less widespread or rarely used languages are defined within *LangOER* context as languages spoken by a small part of people or those overdominated by more widespread languages (Bradley & Vigmo, 2015). The Lithuanian language is not the only one. The project also includes Dutch, Frisian, Greek, Latvian, Polish and Swedish languages whereas the situation of Danish, Estonian, Norwegian and Icelandic is analyzed additionally. Surely it is only a small portion of languages spoken by relatively few individuals.

OER are closely related with information systems. According to the data of the European Commission research, Lithuania is one of the countries, where teachers rarely use information technologies during lessons. Therefore, the initiative “*Open education*” was undertaken. It is supposed to provide conditions and the opportunity for teachers to be more capable of digital teaching so that they could teach students more efficiently. Teachers’ qualification improvement is supported by the initiative “*Open education*”, using open teaching courses following projects of Grand Coalition to foster occupation in the digital sector and designing new European platforms for practical teachers’ communities in the EU or renew the existing ones.

Rapid development of information technologies in Lithuania makes an impact on changes of teaching processes and methods. Blended method of learning is applied in Lithuanian schools. As a result, it is crucial to talk about its quality, i.e. employment of both digital content and aids of the lessons. Regarding the fact, a number of scientific works analysing aspects of applying information technologies in the teaching process and related issues is increasing. Nevertheless, there are not many of such works, as it is still a relatively new research object. One of innovative teaching methods is application of OER in the teaching process. OER are not very popular in Lithuania because they are related to certain innovations: it is not only the ability to master information systems but also sharing the already created products in the public domains. It is in turn related to legal basis of copyright material and tools, which in Lithuania is not clearly defined. Furthermore, authors’ rights and concepts as well as responsibilities of their violation and violators are not well defined either.

The use of OER in teaching is important and relevant to both teachers and students. For students they give new learning experience because the teaching process combines the main senses, i.e. eyesight, hearing, and mental activity. Image and sound reinforce perception of the demonstrated material, develop the skill to evaluate the discussed object in a complex way. OER encourage teachers to use innovative, blended teaching methods while rendering the topic and to involve students when learning uninteresting or complicated themes. It all calls

for improvement of teachers' qualification. On the other hand, disregarding OER advantages, teachers still encounter certain problems. Teachers have not enough experience to provide teaching, select appropriate teaching methods and ways. Although teachers can use information systems really well, one cannot forget that "full-fledged preparation of high-quality teaching content as well as access and validity of IT measures for the designed content are very important" (Gudonienė, 2013). As well as this, innovative methods are more time-consuming when preparing for a lesson if compared to traditional ones. Thus, in this case sharing of the created material becomes important. Open access to learning/teaching resources is very important because when sharing the material, one saves time. A variety of visual material for the same topic emerges and a teacher can select the most appropriate one for a certain group of students. These problems in Lithuania are analysed by (Gudonienė, 2013, Gudonienė, 2011, Čiužas, 2007, Burneikaitė, 2005).

In order to understand the benefit of using OER and advantages of their application, (Teresevičienė et al., 2015) authors of the book more thoroughly reveal the issues of OER in general teaching/learning context, introduce the reader to reasons of OER emergence and development in Lithuania whereas authors describe methodologies of creating OER repositories, discuss the aspects of benefit and applicability (Sabaliauskas et al., 2011).

A part of Lithuanian scientists devote their works to the analysis of distant teaching issues. They pay huge attention to peculiarities and structure of distant teaching, which is important when storing and rendering information (Abarius, 2009), as well as a lack of distant teaching experience, which could be reduced only by blended studies, applied in particular in the systems of higher education (Čiarnienė et al., 2012). This experience could be reinforced by OER employment in schools. Apart from the information they gain, students would also obtain learning experience by using OER. As Čiarnienė et al., claim (2012) IT eliminate time and distance limitations and provide students with the possibilities of open and distance learning, allow access to information anytime and anywhere, even with mobile terminal devices. IT can be used in the learning process in several ways – starting from information delivery and ending with cognitive tools.

Thus, there are not many scientific works concerning the issues of OER in Lithuania. However, one can envisage the already forming aspects and problems related to the use of OER in the Lithuanian language. One can assume that in the future there such research will be more frequent as the implemented projects and development of innovative teaching/learning methods stimulate teachers and students' interest in changes while this in turn encourages improvement and development of teachers' competences and search for innovations. Accordingly, science is concerned with this issue, analyses changes, their outcomes, makes

proposals, extends awareness of such research whereas state-issued documents, which promote development of projects, dissemination of information, and interest in benefits of OER, provide favourable conditions for science development.

In foreign countries OER are applied for education more extensively. It is manifested by abundance and variety of scientific works on this issue. In spite of this, projects, seminars, conferences and other events are organized in different countries for development of OER. For instance, *opening up Education, Kroes and Vassilion* (2013) projects promote educational development and quality by opening education resources to a large learners' community. Attention is paid to OER development in combination with digital networks. This development is outlined in European Commission Strategy (ET 2020) and new Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes. Research findings concerning OER employment in rarely used languages were introduced in Oslo, ICDE international seminar. Moreover, on May 9 2014, EFQUEL Innovation Forum and International LINQ Conference were organized in Crete, where numerous indicators of quality of multilingual OER repositories were provided. As well as this, dissemination priorities were defined and insights were shared.

Foreign experts famous worldwide, namely Paul Kelly, Jean-Louis Maxim, Robert Schuwer, Tian Belawati, Carina Bossu, Grainne Conole, Giles Peper and others, working at universities and consulting networks on the issues of OER, which foster distant teaching ideas and practices, expressed their opinion and insights about OER as well as development of OER repositories in rarely used languages (Bradley & Vigmo, 2014). Much attention is paid to free access to already created education resources so that they could encompass all teaching/learning levels. The importance of openness and sharing of these resources is emphasized (Belliston, 2009, Mallon, 2015, Downen, 2007). Works of foreign scientists analyse what impact on education systems is made by application of OER, problems of introducing innovations when applying OER, and the policy of using OER at the universities (Geser, 2012) are discussed. It is claimed that OER provide multifold benefit, i.e. from academic cooperation to economic development (Johnstone, 2005). Possibilities and challenges of using OER are discussed (Downen, 2007). It is a small portion of scientific works, which analyse OER, importance and development of their application as well as their free access. Nevertheless, one must take into consideration that OER in less widespread languages are not much covered whereas the latter are significant not only as teaching/learning sources but also as promotes of their own language and cultural identity. This aspect for widely spread languages is not that important. Perception of oneself and the surroundings is inevitably related to homeland, mother tongue, culture, and traditions. Thus, OER in rarely used languages perform a more important role than it seems at first sight. It is not

only the element of the education system, stimulating the ability to use information technologies, create innovative teaching/learning methods, extend sharing of OER via the internet, but also encouraging one not to forget his/her language, culture, traditions, national identity. These aspects are especially important when designing teaching/learning methods, teaching material and tasks in one's language whereas free access to OER in rarely used languages allows teachers to share their experience, increase the possibilities of selecting created resources, make use of the existing variety and develop personal competences.

Possibilities of creating and developing OER in the Lithuanian language

Creation of OER in the Lithuanian language is not a rapid process. As it has been mentioned at the beginning of the article, it is determined by the adequate skill of using information technologies, lack of time, etc. If appropriate policy of using and developing OER in Lithuania is pursued, one of the solutions to the problem would be, first of all, organization of training sessions for creation of OER. It could also include seminars for explaining possibilities and benefit of applying OER in teaching/learning process as well as teachers' competences to apply innovative methods in the education process. In addition, hours spent on creating OER could be included into teachers' workload whereas seminars and courses should be free of charge. Promoting sharing of created OER and seeking free access to OER in the Lithuanian language, a database (or several of them) is a necessity so that created and stored material could be uploaded and shared among teachers not only from different schools of the city but schools of the whole country. Creation of the database would facilitate a search for certain material and allow teachers to discuss the provided OER. It all would enrich their experience, stimulate interest and develop creativity. Single OER announced on the internet do not create entirety of application. There is no consistency of the created material and, therefore, the current situation does not encourage teachers to be more deeply involved as OER search is becoming time-consuming occupation. Moreover, in Lithuania it is not very common for everybody to share the created product, announce it in public domains, so that other people could use it. Although Gudonienė et. al., (2013), on the basis of the conducted research, claim that even 80 % of teachers would agree to use the created products, it might be applied for the school only rather than all Lithuanian teachers. One must mention that OER database would help communicate and share material not only among teachers of the same subject but stimulate creation of integrated products. Such communication would improve teachers' qualification and allow applying innovative teaching methods. It would create a possibility to introduce the learning material in a

more interesting way, demonstrate interrelation between topics, etc. The database should be open not only for teachers but also for students and any dweller of Lithuania. Students could get acquainted with visual material of different lessons themselves, review the material of the lesson in order to revise the points that he/she did not master during the lesson. Such OER policy in Lithuania would allow expanding the network of these products rather than OER provided by single teachers. Funding is undoubtedly the most important factor. Everything that has been mentioned is supposed to have a financial basis because otherwise teachers should put a lot of efforts and time, unpaid work in order to implement outcomes of OER in Lithuania. Without funding one can hardly imagine appropriate representation and advertising of OER repositories. Thus, state position for this issue is very important as well. However, at present it is not performing a significant role. Numerous seminars and courses are organized as a part of certain projects. On the basis of teachers' experience, scientific works are developed. One of them is *LangOER*, directly related to OER in less used languages. Aims and objectives of this project are extremely relevant to OER creation in different languages by promoting a development of their open access as well as preservation of the native language.

Conclusions

On the basis of theoretical analysis, one can claim that there are not many scientific works concerning creation, application and development of OER in Lithuania in comparison with foreign countries. More and more scientific works are found in both Lithuania and overseas about IT application when creating OER. Their significance is based on emergence of the innovative teaching method – application of OER in the teaching/learning process.

Development of OER in Lithuanian and other rarely used languages is important when implementing objectives of the education system. For this reason, teachers' training to apply IT when developing course material and appropriate state policy are crucial. Creation of OER database and repositories as well as sharing of teaching material would facilitate the teaching/learning process.

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