

Open Educational Resources on the cards at NAMCOL

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) will soon have a full-fledged Open Educational Resources system up and running. But what does this new and exciting idea stand for? Open Educational Resources (or OERs in short) are defined as freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, and assessing as well as for research purposes. It is one of the leading trends in distance education/open and distance learning domain as a consequence of the openness movement.

OER is a concept from Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) whose aim is to ensure larger/broader access to quality learning and teaching resources at all levels of the educational spectrum. Edwig Karipi, the Programme Manager for Open Schooling at NAMCOL, and who is part of the team driving and developing the OERs programme at NAMCOL says that in 2008 already, COL involved NAMCOL in the OER content development project whereby the institution developed 4 grade 10 subjects on Moodle platform.

“So, our skills to develop OER online content started from that project”, says Karipi. The World OER Congress held at UNESCO, Paris on 20-22 June 2012 was aimed to declare the use and release of OER by all member states with the aim of increasing access to quality learning resources (OER Paris Declaration). Based on that, the Commonwealth of Learning decided to assist Open Schooling Institutions such as NAMCOL to develop OER Policies for their Institutions.

The Institution has already developed an OER policy which was approved by the NAMCOL Board of Governors in 2014. Based on that policy, NAMCOL releases the content on its NOTESMASTER platform for Grades 10 and 12 as OER. The NOTESMASTER content is released under the Creative Commons license which allows anyone to reuse and re-purpose the content as they wish.

The Notesmaster is accessible to all at no cost. Learners need internet connectivity however to access it. All Grade 10 and 12 learners can benefit from the OER content on Notesmaster. “Teachers and any educator can access the resources and can reuse, re-purpose as they wish without getting copyright permission from us. It should be noted however that the original author (NAMCOL) of OER should be acknowledged,” says NAMCOL Programme Manager.

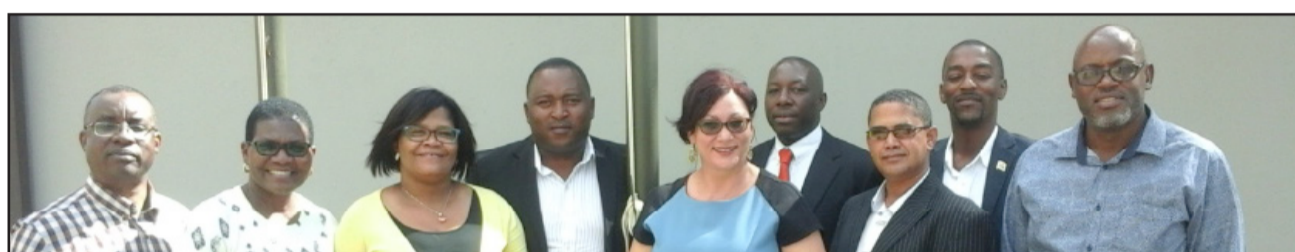
The benefits of such a system are many:

- Resources can be shared and improved as anyone can re-purpose, add value to OER and release as such for others to access
- OER resources are free of charge and can be copied, printed and distributed at no cost to the users. Printing costs however can be charged
- Quality learning resources are made available and accessible to all
- OER increase equitable access to learning resources
- Open textbooks will reduce the cost of study material for learners.

Karipi says that there are still very few OER content out there especially from Namibian Institutions and Africa in general. She would like to encourage other institutions to commit themselves and promote the development of OER content.

UPDATE

Ministry of Education's Permanent Secretary Visit NAMCOL



The Permanent Secretary with NAMCOL management

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Sanet Steenkamp, paid a visit to NAMCOL recently. This was the first time that she is visiting the college. The purpose of the visit was to familiarize and update herself about the college as well as developments taking place here. Welcoming the PS, the Director of NAMCOL, Heroldt Murangi, said that this visit was planned a long time ago and thanked her for ultimately making it.

“It is good that she came because our mandate is not readily appreciated”, said Murangi. He went on to say that even the Minister, who visited NAMCOL before, was not quite sure about our mandate. Her visit is vital because she is the accounting officer who has to decide on a range of issues that will affect NAMCOL.

The Permanent Secretary thanked NAMCOL for inviting her. She said that she has been meeting other divisions within the Ministry such as arts and culture to iron out problem areas. Thus it would be useful to sit together and discuss issues in an open and frank manner, said Steenkamp. She further said that it would be interesting to meet with NAMCOL management to discuss pertinent issues regarding the college. Her visit had a two-pronged purpose: for the PS to familiarize herself with the college and for NAMCOL to raise some issues pertinent to the execution of its mandate.

Thus it was a mixed bag of issues that were discussed during the visit. Kicking off the discussion, the Director, pointed out the NAMCOL make use of teachers from the formal school system as tutors and this is a challenge because those teachers might not be readily available. In addition to the challenges of making use of outside teachers; there is also an urgent need for more classes because the schools have their own afternoon classes. Steenkamp pointed out that the Ministry was prepared to go the extra mile to help teachers improve and that the Ministry has an agreement with NUST to help in that process.

And at the tertiary level it was pointed out that UNAM, NUST and IUM will not be able to accommodate all of the out-of-school learners (grade 12) and therefore, there is a need to expand and diversify programmes at NAMCOL to accommodate the extra students. This will, of course, require an increase in the budget allocation. The PS responded saying that should be factor in the budget request.

The college has in the meantime developed 8 subjects for higher level study. NAMCOL has over the years introduced a number of certificate and diploma courses, the PS was told. And there is some collaborative ventures with some universities in some of the diploma courses. For example, the Diploma in Education for Development with UNISA and the Diploma in Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education with the University of Natal. All the programmes at the NQA level 5 qualify for NSF5.

Murangi pointed out that 4200 students present a challenge for NAMCOL because students are scattered around the country. He says that collaborative work is key to solving some of the problems. Thus NAMCOL work with UNAM and NUST. Sharing of resources is thus crucial. As an example NUST facilities at Otjiwarongo should be made available to NAMCOL students because ‘we are all funded by the same government’, said Murangi.

On her part Steenkamp said she has learned a lot. The PS said: “There is no doubt we have to live up to our mandate as a Ministry”. The PS said: we didn’t honour our part of the mandate to what we agreed to in terms of the allocation. Nevertheless, Murangi said the NAMCOL was thankful for the additional funding. Steenkamp said there is a need that NAMCOL should start sitting on the Early Childhood Development committee so that the Ministry can tap from ‘its expertise’.

From Correspondence Colleges To Open And Distance Learning Institutions

What do you believe in? Is it revolution or evolution? That question is usually posed in the context of the transformation that has been taking place on the educational front in the area of open and distance learning (ODL). The answer according to experts is that this has been a process of evolution. ODLs in their present form and shape have been evolving from the purely correspondence colleges (the first generation of distance education) to become what they are today. The progression through these stages of development has been driven mainly by changes in technology and educational theory.

In the Namibian context the only avenue, at that time, were colleges that were based in South Africa – Damelin College, College South Africa, among others. And many people are products of correspondence colleges. Today people, who unable because of a number of various reason cannot go through the conventional system, are now going through the ODL system to get their education. NAMCOL and BOCODOL in Botswana are two recent examples of ODL colleges in the region. On the occasion of the official opening of NAMCOL Academic Year, Deputy Minister, Christine //Hoebes said: “NAMCOL should not be seen as a place for

the hopeless and for failures, but as a place of new beginnings, place of hope, a place of second chance, a place of opportunity.” She went on to say that: “Our attitude towards distance learning should change. The one who studies through the distance mode is in no way inferior to those doing full time studies. I am a product of distance learning.”

Distance learning is a method of education. Students can study in their own time, at the place of their choice (home, work or learning centres), sometimes on their own or face-to-face contact with a tutor. Technology is a critical element of distance education.

Thus around the world, the academic community is discovering and exploring the vast possibilities that ICT has to offer to achieve an extended classroom or learning experience.

Distance education has been around for a long time, its form has evolved in a number of ways. However, open learning is a more recent phenomena and its definition varies from college to college and is still evolving. The combination of distance education (i.e. the ability to study from the distance) and open learning (i.e. the ability for anyone to access the educational offer) is often referred to as Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

Different institutes have different degree of openness. Due to an ever widening scope of offer, methods and approaches, different ODL institutions differ in their nature of openness and their implementation of distance education. That is why when one is choosing an ODL institute one has to consider the following values related to flexibility and accessibility.

Educationalists usually identify 6 characteristics of openness:

1. Open Accessibility
2. Freedom of Time
3. Freedom of Pace
4. Freedom of Place
5. Open Programming
6. Open to People

But experts say that no teaching system is completely open (minimum levels of literacy are required, for instance). Open, distance, flexible and online learning are rarely found in their ‘purest’ forms, according to the Commonwealth of Learning. So, Quo Vadis ODL?