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Open Education

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By metaphorical extension, *open education* suggests being “open,” that is, the removal of obstacles, so that the benefits of education are made available to everyone. The history of open education can be traced to the 1960s, when as an alternative to the traditional, formal system of education, English primary schools emerged in the United States, with certain informal ways of educating children. Children were allowed to move in, around, and out of the classroom at will; there was little use of bells to prescribe lesson segments; age and sex differences were abolished; and integrated learning was practiced instead of the traditional school subjects. In Britain, a similar movement termed *informal education*, following the principle of learning by doing, encouraged children to be self-directed and creative in schools without walls. This new movement of adopting child-centered methods and allowing children to design the curricula of learning that met their needs received wider appreciation.

Openness in education may be viewed as a successive series of utopian events guided by the core Enlightenment ideologies of bringing freedom, equality, democracy, and creativity to the field of education. These historical events may be segmented into five phases: (1) the open classroom, (2) open schooling, (3) open university, (4) open courseware, and (5) open education. Over the years, open education witnessed several strands and movements that often coalesced and overlapped to create a complex skein that contributed to the formation of an open society. Education has always depended on technology, from the abacus and stone tablet to the blackboard and computer. Recent advancements in information and communication technology have paved the way to undertaking innovative, collaborative efforts, particularly in the field of education. The term *open educational resources* (OER) was coined in 2002 at an international forum organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, but initiatives for OER started prior to that.

In 2000, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology proposed to publish all its course materials online to make them widely available to everyone. Following this, Massachusetts Institute of Technology OpenCourseWare (OCW) was launched in 2001. This initiative led to the formation of the OCW Consortium in 2008, an independent nonprofit organization with more than 250 universities and associated organizations worldwide as members. The OCW Consortium seeks to advance formal and informal learning through the worldwide sharing and use of free, open, and high-quality educational materials organized as courses. Collectively, OCW Consortium members have published more than 13,000 courses in 20 languages, available through the consortium’s Web site. Apart from this, two international organizations, namely, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Commonwealth of Learning, have consistently championed the concept of OER.

Evolving in the background of open sharing, open education has served the cause of improving educational access and effectiveness worldwide to best suit the needs of learners at each stage of their education, from primary to higher education and research. Open education today has opened up new vistas for those who want to learn better, particularly for students, workers, researchers, and teachers. Students can have access to additional resources to learn things better and succeed in life. Workers can become more efficient. Researchers can share their findings, develop new networks, and improve their research work. Teachers can learn new skills to help teach students better. Most important, through open education, the openly available resources can be translated, mixed together, broken apart, and openly shared again, increasing access

The emergence of open education has yielded a few socioeconomic benefits. First, open education offers the opportunity to design courses based on local needs. Thus, the poorest sections of society benefit from it the most, those who have so far been the victims of the digital divide. Second, open education can be a boon to developing countries plagued with infrastructure bottlenecks, inefficiency in the utilization of existing resources, and technological and other socioeconomic constraints. A joint study conducted by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank in 2000 showed that developing countries have more than 80 percent of the world's population, yet the gross enrollment ratio in higher education in those countries is just half of the world's gross enrollment ratio, and the quality of higher education offered remains another issue. Open education can substantially change such a scenario by linking these countries with other leading countries for fair, global, adaptive, and sustainable collaboration.

Third, open education is not necessarily bound or limited to the physical presence of teachers and learners at the same location or to fixed teacher and learner roles. Open education, in principle, is independent of platforms and not limited to a single provider. Fourth, open educational services are cost-effective and, therefore, are economically - viable and affordable. Services offered can be of manifold nature, including traditional in-class support and individual tutoring that can be provided on a local basis, and thus can be a powerful means for providing access to high-quality education.

Open education and the traditional system are not mutually exclusive; in fact, both can contribute to the fulfillment of the greater cause of education. Open education, by virtue of its being free and open, may bring inclusiveness to the traditional system of education by the nature of its service to students, such as support, assessment of learning, certification of course completion, and providing access to physical infrastructures that may help learners better their learning experience and outcome.

However, a few concerns remain. First, many have questioned the sustainability of open education. Because open education is freely available, can it be sustainable? However, many have pointed out that the model of cost sharing in educational provision and delivery may be a sustainable model for open education. Second, the socialization of open learners has also been questioned. Many have pointed out that there is no clear-cut methodology for assessing the performance of open learners. That being so, how can open learners compare with traditional learners? Are they socially relevant? The reaction from supporters of open education to this question is that open education need not follow the same yardstick of performance measurement that the traditional system of education has so far followed. Social relevance of the outcome should be judged by the quality of work produced rather than by subjecting it to any traditional evaluative measurement.

See also [Learning by Doing](#); [Massive Open Online Courses \(MOOCs\)](#); [Online Education](#); [Open Source Networks](#)

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Further Readings

Glennie, Jenie, Ken Harley, Neil Butcher, and Trudi van Wyk, eds. Perspectives on

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