

Education ministers see teachers as crucial for promoting OER

Ljubljana, 18 September - Education ministers from around the world discussing open educational resources (OER) at an international congress in Ljubljana on Monday agreed that the training teachers and motivating them to use ICT technologies in class was crucial for mainstreaming OER. They also underlined the importance of the quality of resources.

The quality of teaching is of great concern. We have to ensure it across all levels, said Lehbib Isselmou Sidi el Moctar of Mauritania. He believes the society should benefit from technological progress and that a platform should be set up to enable a switch from conventional platforms.

Minister Denitsa Sacheva of Bulgaria pointed to the generational gap, saying that the Bulgarian education system consisted of teachers who were not born in the digital era and that they too should use digitalisation as a tool.

Macedonian Minister Renata Deskoska identified IT illiteracy of teachers and their resistance to new technologies as a major challenge in her country. Legal requirements regarding the inclusion of ICT in school programmes are not being implemented, she said.

Angie Motshekga of South Africa proposed incentives for teachers who integrate ICT into their lessons and incentives for companies which can give people access to electricity and the internet.

Turning to the issue of quality of educational resources, Deskoska noted that in her country, a part of the textbooks was available on-line and a part was not because of the publishing constraints. The material that is on-line is open to discussion among experts, which improves its quality, she said.

The training of teachers is a problem also in Bangladesh and ICT education is compulsory, said Minister Nurul Nahid.

Croatia's Blaženka Divjak said she missed a systematic approach to digitalisation and raised the issue of parents' distrust towards OER.

Jurgita Petrauskiene of Lithuania agreed that new models of teaching, a new framework was called for.

Sonia Mora Escalante of Costa Rica said her country invested almost 8% of GDP to education and promoted OER. But she said a lot needed to be done in the training of teachers to go beyond just using digital material in class and to form a global citizenry.

Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun of Mauritius noted that in her country all the educational material was available for free on-line. But she sees a challenge in enabling those outside the educative system to reach this material.

Sonia Mora Escalante of Costa Rica expressed the belief that OER should have global and local relevance and stressed that cultural diversity should be promoted by each individual country.

While stressing the need for an open educational community, she pointed to the pressure of the commercial community. The role of international cooperation and international organisations is crucial here, she said.

According to Evarist Bartolo of Malta, schools must be careful not to promote digitalisation too much, as children must be encouraged to spend time outdoors as well so as not to confuse the digital reality with the actual, social reality.

He also stressed that first the issue of poverty must be overcome to make people benefit from education and OER.

The ministers of Bulgaria and Malta called for personalisation as opposed to standardisation in education. Denitsa stressed the need for individual approach to children, especially to those with disadvantages and those with special talents.

Bartolo said inclusion was not about having "one size that fits all", but developing diverse educational programmes tailored to the needs of individuals.