

Students should be co-producers of OER, UNESCO congress hears

Ljubljana, 19 September (STA) - Students should be co-producers not just passive users of open educational resources (OER), agreed the panellists of a debate on the role of teachers, students and institutions on OER in Ljubljana on Tuesday.

Presenting the voice of students at today's debate, Helge Schwitters, the head of the European Students' Union, said that OER were about student-centred learning and shifting the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student.

Students should be seen as co-producers of knowledge, he stressed.

OER offer the choice of curricula, give the opportunity to develop both the teachers' methods and the content provided, including choosing the tools used in teaching, Schwitters said.

They give students access to cheaper learning material that is accessible outside of campus, adaptable to individual's needs and translatable to student's own language. They encourage creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and internationalisation.

This is why students who come to the university must see OER as the norm and not as the "more ideal alternative", Schwitters pointed out.

His idea of students as co-producers of knowledge was echoed by Christopher Maiyaki of the Nigerian National Universities Commission.

He said students had to become champions of OER, content producers not just consumers and challenge lecturers on the use of OER for better quality of education.

Teachers on the other hand should embrace the potential of OER, adopt new methods of teaching, contextualise OER and develop OER material for people with disabilities, he said.

Reporting on the problems encountered by teachers, David Robinson of the Canadian Association of University Teachers said teachers often had problems accessing and locating the most relevant OER.

They struggle with financial and legal barriers, and lack incentives and support. Teachers are expected to contextualise and adjust OER to specific cultures in their spare time, he pointed out.

But he is confident that these barriers can be mitigated through government and institutions' investment in infrastructure, incentives, including for teachers, and in policy development, he said.

According to Torunn Gjelsvik of the International Council for Distance and Open Education, this can be achieved only through raising awareness of the potential of OER. International collaboration is crucial, she stressed.

There is a gap between the number of OER repositories and OER production on the one hand and the efficiency of their use on the other, which is why repositories should be connected and international communities created to promote their use, Gjelsvik said.

Maiyaki too called for a dynamic international coalition, saying that Nigeria was open to partnership and would like to stimulate cooperation.