Who opens online distance education, to whom, and for what?
A critical literature review on open educational practices

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Abstract

In the previous era of open educational practices (OEPs) based around distance teaching, its actors and their target group were clear to define: open universities and disadvantaged learners. In this new era of OEPs linked to digitalised open educational resources (OERs), there are multiple actors and beneficiaries of OEPs. This critical literature review examined a large volume of scholarly narratives about OEPs in online distance education contexts, by asking a simple but important question of "who opens online distance education to whom, and for what?". The results suggest that despite the growing importance on the social mission to "make education for all" among diverse actors, there is a lack of clear understanding of the actual process of OEPs in real-life HE settings and it is rather unclear how those actors actually serve disadvantaged learners. The article suggests that we refocus our OEP effort on opening HE to the disadvantaged and collecting real-life stories of OEPs and the disadvantaged.

Keywords: open educational practice; open educational resource; online education; distance education; open university

1. Introduction

This article reports the results of a critical literature review on open educational practices (OEPs) in online higher education (HE) settings. OEP is often defined in close connection with open educational resources (OERs) as the following example shows:

> [OEPs are] considered as policies and practices implemented by HE institutions that support the development, use, and management of OERs, and the formal assessment and accreditation of informal learning undertaken using OERs. (Murphy, 2013, p. 202)

Since the term OER was first adopted in 2002 at a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) forum, there has been a continuing emphasis on developing and making digitalised educational resources open and available for the public to use at no cost. Consequently, a vast volume of OERs, including thousands of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), have been made available across the globe (Nikoi & Armellini, 2012). Unlike how OEPs are often, in the victorious narratives about the OER movements, referred to as new and novel practices that have only emerged with the prevalence of OERs and digital technologies, there is a long historical backdrop of current OEP initiatives (Weller, Jordan, DeVries, & Rolfe, 2018).

The earlier history of OEPs can be effectively illustrated by the development of distance education and open universities. Distance education—a precedent of online education—had

originally emerged out of altruistic, justice-oriented, ideals promoted by intellectuals and elite universities, whose aim was to provide HE opportunities to the socially disadvantaged (Bergmann, 2001). For example, the University of London was the first university to offer distance programs to students from less privileged backgrounds in 1858; and by the end of the 1800s, a vast group of students enrolled in distance programs offered by elite universities as a part of their "university extension movement" (Storr, 1966).

In the previous era of OEPs based around distance teaching and learning, the target student group of distance education was relatively clear to define: the disadvantaged. Thus, open educators made focused effort to remove various educational, economic, geographical, and social barriers that prevent the target students' access and success in HE. In this new era of OEPs linked to the digitalised OER movements, however, there is a broad range of OEPs with a product-oriented focus on access to resources (Knox, 2013). Alongside the growing popularity of the OER movements, OEP becomes many different educational and/or scholarly practices aiming to open resources to the general public—assumably or ambitiously enabling "education for all" (Wright & Reju, 2012).

Such product-oriented OEPs have been normalised across the entire HE sector. Not only open universities and but campus-based universities have now participated in OEP initiatives. Yet, the universalisation of OEPs and generalisation of their target groups may mislead higher educators about the core purpose of their OEPs, while depriving them of opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations on the real beneficiaries of their efforts. In other words, HE institutions and higher educators are increasingly busy with making materials available free of charge to the pubic—often, however, conceiving the public generically, as an imaginary group of unknown and unspecified mass. Such efforts sometimes turn out to be rather aimless and undirected and so, consequently, ineffective in making actual changes in society—other than reinforcing the normalisation of OEPs and relevant political discourses. In this context, a genuine pursuit of the original social inclusion agenda of distance education among open educators has been lost (Lee, 2019).

Thus, this article attempts to draw open educators' attention back to the original, focused, social mission of distance education, which was to "open the door" of universities to those who were not able to access face-to-face education (Bossu, Bull, & Brown, 2012). This critical literature review explored and critiqued the current status of OEPs by systematically analysing scholarly narratives concerning OEPs in online HE settings. Following Koseoglu and Bozkurt (2018), this article defines OEPs as "a broad range of [online and distance HE] practices that are informed by open education initiatives and movements and that embody the value and visions of openness" (p. 455). While the article is clear about its directional pointer towards re-establishing the human-

oriented focus of distance education, it deliberately remains the notion of OEP as open as possible in order to allow data itself to speak about "who opens online HE to whom, and for what".

2. Methodology

The review project followed a systematic scoping process when searching for literature and selecting articles for critical review (see Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The evidence base was collected by searching journal articles in Scopus, the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. The search was conducted based on the title, abstract, and keywords of articles, using the following search terms:

- "open education*"
- "universit*" OR "higher education" AND
- "online education" OR "online learning" OR "distance education" OR "distance learning"

The above search, when conducted in August 2019, returned 137 items. To maintain the quality and feasibility of the present analysis, the author performed a subsequent filtering process. To be included in the review, the abstract of a paper must demonstrate that the paper discusses real-life OEPs—literature review papers and conceptual articles were excluded. In addition, the source of an article needs to be indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index citation database, which suggests that scholarly narratives presented in the chosen text include valid points. Papers with marginal focus on online HE were also excluded. For example, although Hodgkinson-Williams and Paskevicius (2012) developed a useful conceptual framework of the OER mix, the paper mainly focused on the value of adopting and deloping OERs in face-to-face HE settings. Another paper (Hendricks, Reinsberg, & Rieger, 2017) investigated undergraduate students' experiences with using OERs. Although such OER provision enabled students to engage with online learning, the main findings of the study were concerned about students' learning outcomes in face-to-face contexts. As a result, 29 papers were selected for inclusion in the review project (see Appendix A).

The author analysed the selected papers, using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). The author initially read the 29 papers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature of claims about OEPs across the papers. The coding was done following the three steps suggested by Strauss and Corbin's (2015): coding, axial coding, and selective coding. First, all meaningful statements about OEPs were collected from the selected papers. Most articles presented multiple claims and, in total, 159 paragraphs were coded. The initial codes (N=52) were identified and named by highlighting meaningful phases on the printed articles, such as "developing countries", "distance teachers", "education for all", "universal education", and "OCW". The second round of reading was undertaken and initial codes were carefully examined and compared with/against each other to select and categorise the claims that appeared more frequently within the selected articles. As a result, the

codes were logically organised and grouped into independent categories (N=12) including "universities as representative actors", "other opening actors", "formal learners", "non-formal learners", "specified disadvantaged learners", and "unspecified disadvantaged learners".

The 12 categories were further developed into 5 more substantial themes as a result of the final round of coding. The main part of the paper will present the 5 themes, divided into 3 sub-sections: 1) who is doing the opening of online HE; 2) for whom is it being opened, and 3) for what purpose is it being opened? To increase the "trustworthiness" of the research outcomes, the author invited two of her colleagues to serve a role of "critical friends" (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) who reviewed earlier drafts of the present paper and supported the construction of the final narratives presented in this paper.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Who is doing the opening of online HE?

Opening actors and supporting actors. All of the selected 29 papers in their introduction refer to universities (or HE institutions, more broadly) as main opening actors of HE. As the following excerpt suggests, universities in those scholarly narratives often consist of a group of "experts" in diverse academic fields (i.e., "professors" in Blackmon, 2018; "instructors" in Sheu & Shih, 2017) whose knowledge and expertise are worthwhile for the public to access.

> *Apple launched iTunes U* in 2007 as a repository of audiovisual materials (as well as PDFs and iBooks) *provided by universities* to disseminate digital education content, both to the general public and—in some cases—to their own students... The service was heralded as a new way of providing unprecedented access to lectures and materials *created by top experts in their fields*. It was also immediately successful: within three years it had reached 300 million downloads… there is a clear appetite for online lectures, making reference to the success of sites such as TED or YouTube EDU, and welcomes the access granted to *great experts in their field from top prestigious universities*, previously available to an exclusive minority only. (Rosell-Aguilar, 2013, p. 121, emphasis added)

On the surface, many authors rather simply suggest that universities as a single institutional entity are responsible for OEPs, making HE more accessible and inclusive. However, it later becomes clear that it is individual faculty members who are actually in charge of making their lecturer or materials open—that is, academics are often chief actors of OEPs in those narratives. Therefore, the importance of academics' positive attitudes towards OEPs, willingness to do OEPs, and abilities to do OEPs is stressed by most authors. Some narrowly focus on faculty members'

experiences with and perceptions on creating and/or using OERs (e.g., Blackmon, 2018; Karunanayaka & Naidu, 2018; Sheu & Shih, 2017).

Another noticeable finding, shared by all 29 papers, is that while the main actors of OEPs are unarguably HE institutions (in a collective sense) and individual educators (more in an operational sense), there are also technology-driven contributors to the OEP initiatives. For example, in the above except, Apple is mentioned as being an original creator of iTunes U that ultimately enabled *the prestigious universities* and *great experts* to digitally share their lectures. Although most articles do not explicitly refer to any specific companies or tools as main opening actors, they all implicitly suggest the advancement of new technologies as a fundamental contributing factor for making educational resources and practices open (e.g., ICTs in Chib & Wardoyo, 2018; mobile devices in Young & Hung, 2014; the Internet in Zhou, 2016).

When reading the texts more carefully, the present author encountered more diverse actors whose roles are critical but not foregrounded in those texts:

> *Team effort is another key factor in success.* Regardless of the challenges, issues, and limitations, [National Taiwan University (NTU) OpenCourseWare] has achieved its initial goal to successfully provide whole courses with high quality open educational materials. It requires collaboration and team efforts across units, including administrative support from the university, the Dean of the Office of Academic Affairs, the Director of NTU Open Forum for New Intellectuals… *Participating professors' openness and enthusiasm for education to all* is also an important factor in project success. More than 100 professors now participate in NTU [OpenCourseWare] and share a devotion to open courseware. (Sheu & Shih, 2017, p. 118, emphasis added).

As suggested, there are a large number of "supporting" actors (i.e., administrative staff and units in the above except) who assisted those main "opening" actors (i.e., professors in the above except). However, most of the articles, those supporting actors are rather silent and not explicitly present in their scholarly narratives. It is observed that the importance of their support or "team efforts" is often overshadowed by an emphasis on the "participating professors' openness and enthusiasm for education to all" (see above). This observation suggests an urgent need to develop a more sophisticated understanding or real-life stories about doing OEPs, which are obviously much more complex and challenging processes that involve more actors than just universities and/or academics.

Universities. It is worthwhile to more closely examine the characteristics of different universities represented, as main opening actors, in the scholarly narratives about OEPs. As discussed above, despite the rather simple representation of those actors opening HE (i.e., universities or academics), there are multiple actors and contributors to the process of OEPs in real-life HE settings. Similarly,

the term "universities" represents at least four radically different types of universities such as traditional campus-based universities, open and distance universities, Western universities and nonprofit organizations. First, more than half of the selected papers (N=16) refer to the MIT OpenCourseWare project as the origin of the OER movement as shown in the following excerpt. Those papers mainly discuss the OEP responsibilities and strategies employed by traditional campus-based universities (including those "top prestigious universities" as in Rosell-Aguilar, 2013, p. 121).

> On April 4th, 2001, MIT announced its intention to publish the core educational materials, including syllabi, lecture notes, assignments and exams, from all of its courses freely and openly on the Web for use by educators and learners worldwide through a project dubbed "MIT OpenCourseWare." MIT was soon joined in this effort by universities around the world for which the mission of openly sharing educational content resonated strongly with long-established and deeply held institutional commitments. (Carson, Kanchanaraksa, Gooding, Mulder, & Schuwer, 2012, p. 20)

Second, another group of papers (N=7) is concerned with the OEPs of open and distance universities. As the below excerpt demonstrates, OEPs are not necessarily new practices to this group of universities that are originally established with a particular social mission of providing educational opportunities to the underserved by other campus-based universities. Thus, these distance HE institutions are described as experienced actors of OEPs who are responsible for leading the OEP movement or being an early adopter of certain OEPs.

> [T]he iTunes U output from the OU is different from other providers'. Most universities provide lengthy recordings of lectures that have been delivered face-to-face as a catch-up service for their own students (or for anyone who might be interested in the topic). Their resources are not primarily designed as distance learning materials; they have been repurposed as iTunes U resources. In contrast, all OU on iTunes U resources have been produced specifically for publication on iTunes U for external users. (Rosell-Aguilar, 2013, p. 126)

Third, there are also four papers specifically discussing OEPs in developing countries (i.e., Tonga in Abeywardena, Uys, & Fifita, 2019; Low-to Middle-Income Countries in Heller, Strobl, & Madhok, 2019; Nigeria in Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006; and sub-Saharan Africa in Wright & Reju, 2012). One of the common narratives about universities prevailing in these papers is about Western universities. Although all four papers include local universities as main opening actors of HE in the focused developing countries, Western universities (and international organisations such as UNESCO and United Nations) appear as main supporting or leading actors. That is, there is a rather clear separation (i.e., institutional hierarchies) between Western universities and non-Western

universities in these narratives—as Western universities being providers and non-Western universities being beneficiaries.

> The People's Open Access Education Initiative, known as Peoples-uni… aims to contribute to improvements in the health of populations in low- to middle-income countries by building public health capacity via e-learning at affordable cost. This paper describes our experience over nine years of the initiative in the development and delivery of a master's programme in public health, including our collaboration with a UK University for an accredited Master of Public Health degree. (Heller, Strobl, & Madhok, 2019, p. 80)

Lastly, there are another group of open distance universities—nonprofit organizations, which are newly established as part of the OEP initiatives: such as University of Third Age (U3A), Curriki, University of the People (UoPeople), and the Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU). The development of these new universities is chiefly inspired by the spirit of community-driven openness and knowledge sharing. Although this new model of open distance universities is mentioned in a number of papers (N=6), only one paper specifically focuses on this type of universities:

> U3A is a digital version of the international U3A, where volunteer writers create online courses for older learners anywhere in the world. University of the People… is the world's first nonprofit, tuition-free, accredited online academic institution dedicated to opening access to higher education globally. What these nonprofit organizations have in common is that they emphasize the importance of including users as part of creating course content through peer-to-peer learning and interaction in online communities. (Andersen & Ponti, 2014, p. 234)

In this type of university, the operating actors are not necessarily affiliated members of the university. Instead, anyone across the globe, who has something to share, can voluntarily play the role of OEP provider, and they are often the beneficiaries of other volunteers' OEPs at the same time. While these initiatives provide idealistic narratives of peer-to-peer learning, the voluntary nature of the peer-to-peer interactions seems to threaten the sustainability of the online community.

3.2. For whom is online HE being opened?

A massive number of unknown beneficiaries. There is a large volume of narratives about beneficiaries (e.g., learners, students, users, participants, etc.) in the selected 29 papers. Yet, most of those narratives are rather general:

> As a recent innovation to online learning, these [MOOCs] represent the latest stage in the evolution of open educational resources... Such courses are accessible through the

Internet and are usually open to registration without prerequisites or limits on the number of students. With their advantages of large scale, openness and self-organization, MOOCs have attracted 160,000 students from more than 190 countries. (Zhou, 2016, p. 194)

These narratives stress that online HE is now more accessible to a larger number of "potential" students with diverse barriers to participating in face-to-face HE. Lane (2012) provides a comprehensive list of such potential barriers: "geographical remoteness; cultural norms; social norms; prior achievements; absolute individual or household income; digital divide; physical circumstances; individual norms; and institutional attitudes and behaviors (p. 140)". On the other hand, when it comes to "actual" students who have accessed and benefited from OEPs, descriptions tend to be restricted to general perceptions and access patterns of the unknown mass (at best, their demographic information):

Learners' average profile is a Spanish female, approximately 37 years old, with a University degree, and generally employed. For many of the participants, [the Spanish National University of Distance Education] MOOCs were their first experiences with these sorts of courses, and the main reasons for enrolment were the course topic and the perceived usefulness for professional development. The expectations regarding completion and certification were initially very high, but completion rates remain below 14%. (Gil-Jaurena, Callejo-Gallego, & Agudo, 2017, p. 142)

One of the most frequently used markers to better conceptualise or categorise the unknown beneficiaries is whether they are insiders or outsiders in relation to a particular HE institution. Thirteen papers use this "insider-or-outsider" categorisation even though different authors employ slightly different terminologies, such as "formal learners-or-informal learners" (Law & Perryman, 2017) and "the registered-or-the unregistered" (Wright & Reju, 2012). Rosell-Aguilar (2013) discusses some pedagogical implications of having the divided target group (i.e., "their own student-or-strangers") as follows:

Many of the research reports on the impact of podcasting have found that *students* rated the podcasts highly as supplementary materials, to catch up on missed lectures, and as revision tools… Since most providers of open educational resources through iTunes U offer materials that were originally intended for *their own students*, their resources go from being ideally designed for their *target audience*, to being a resource that… may not be appropriate for *the listener*. From teaching *a known audience*, providers teach '*strangers*' instead. (p. 122, emphasis added)

Despite the critical, and genuine, challenges associated with the mission of serving the unknown, in the selected papers, there are not enough discussions on the challenges and potential

solutions. Instead, by employing such a categorical division of the target group of beneficiaries, most authors seem to argue two interrelated points regarding their OEPs. Firstly, by highlighting the existence of actual "outsiders" in their OEPs, they want to prove that they have actually contributed to the popular social mission of "education for all" (Okonkwo, 2012). Secondly, there seems to be a strong attempt to blur the conceptual boundary between formal learning and informal learning by reinforcing the idea that "anyone can access university education from anywhere and at any time" regardless of their demographic and social status. This idea further develops into self-referential, rather rhetorical, claims such as that "online HE is accessible to anyone, from anywhere, at any time" without being clear about to "whom, where, and when" (see Lee, 2017).

Disadvantaged learners. Given that the massiveness of potential beneficiaries of OEPs, despite their unknown characteristics, promotes untested claims about how accessible online HE is, it is worthwhile to closely look at some of the better-known groups of disadvantaged learners in the current OEP landscape. A typical narrative about the disadvantaged who may "greatly" benefit from OEPs are shown in the following excerpt:

> 'the benefits of [OER] are greatest in low- and middle-income countries, where they have the potential to increase access to learning for those who may otherwise be excluded'. The 2014 OpenLearn survey data show that 10% of the survey respondents live in developing countries (based on the International Monetary Fund classification). (Law & Perryman, 2017, p. 17)

One noticeable aspect shared by such narratives is a global scale of their arguments. Their arguments are either based upon data collected from developing countries and/or drawn from extreme sociocultural and political circumstances that evidently hinder local populations from participating in HE (see more Bozkurt, Koseoglu, Singh, 2019). In such challenging educational contexts, OEPs (often from developed countries) are unsurprisingly suggested as a revolutionary solution to the aforementioned issues. For example, Wright and Reju (2012) ask such a question as "What do the people below have in common?" and provide vivid illustrations of five different figures all in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the illustrated figures is Bethel Msiska who:

> was born and raised at the edge of Lilongwe, Malawi. She excels in most subjects, but her mathematical skills are weak. If Bethel could improve her grades in mathematics, she might be able to obtain a college scholarship. If she succeeded, she would be the first person in her extended family to go to college. Unfortunately, her parents only completed primary school and are unable to help her with mathematics. In addition, they cannot afford a tutor. (p. 182)

Although it was not clear in their writing, to what extent those six figures are drawn from actual data or real-life stories, their answer to the question was clear as:

what these individuals have in common is that they could all benefit from using [OERs] in formal, informal, and self-learning settings. They are also fortunate to be living in a time when there seems to be a convergence surrounding the importance of education to the cultural, social, and economic development of Africa. In addition, digital technology has opened up unlimited possibilities in communication and education. A greater number of learners now have options regarding what, when, where, and how they learn. (p. 182-183)

This article has been cited by many other authors (N=43), including ones in the Westen context. Such stories about the disadvantaged in developing countries, regardless of the (in-)authenticity of the stories, tend to effectively support further arguments about the social impact of OEPs across the globe. That is, the focus on the third world (from the Western world) in these "openness" arguments is rather powerful. It is particularly the case when in-house survey results about OEP users' demography continuously betray the great expectations among open educators— as discussed above, the actual OER users in Western contexts are mostly those already with a university degree, thus not fitting usual conceptions of disadvantaged. Presumably, due to the lack of evidence for OEPs actually serving the disadvantaged at a domestic level, the narratives often go global, which is ironically even more unknown to many readers.

This analytic critique, however, should not neglect the existing meaningful attempts to actually identify and serve a particular group of the disadvantaged, despite their small number. For example, in the following excerpt, Chib and Wardoyo (2018) provide a comprehensive illustration of how migrant domestic workers would improve their living quality and employability through self-directed OER learning:

For Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Singapore, the assumption is that ODL offers increased access and flexibility to gain access to higher education, while solving constraints related to limited time, income, and mobility… We examined female migrant domestic workers due to the following reasons. First, their employment and living circumstances are socially isolated; hence their access and use of ICTs provides for an interesting and significant research context. Second, these domestic workers were all women, thus the results may be used to inform policy decisions with regard to the impact of women's education and ICTs skill on employability and literacy. (p. 97)

3.3. For what purpose is online HE being opened?

Complex realities behind simple rhetoric of openness. Answers to the question "for what purpose is online HE being opened?" were far more challenging to find by analysing scholarly narratives in

the selected papers due to the rhetorical nature of the presented narratives. All 29 papers explicitly, often strongly, argue that the ultimate purpose of their OEPs is to open up HE to the disadvantaged (and to all who have basic Internet access). As discussed earlier, there is a simple, and obvious, narrative running across all reviewed papers—universities (must) do OEPs to make HE more accessible to the disadvantaged. Yet, when the same question is asked differently as "what are actual reasons for the universities to do OEPs?", the answers get rather complex. The below excerpt effectively summarises the complexity and multiplicity of the purposes of OEPs from HE institutions' perspective:

> [HE] institutions are *under significant competitive pressure* to provide high-quality, low-cost educational experiences to greater numbers of students… Previous studies have identified *a combination of altruistic and strategic motives* that potentially drive [HE] institutions to adopt [OEPs]… Strategic reasons for adoption identified in these studies include the potential to increase the reputation and profile of the organisation, thereby providing opportunities for students to obtain first-hand experience of educational courses offered by an institution… They may also secure valuable opportunities for funding from social or governmental grants or encourage potential partnerships with other education organisations. (Murphy, 2013, p. 203, emphasis added)

Of many statements presented in the above excerpt, the first one about universities being "under significant competitive pressure" may deserve close attention—alongside the phenomenon that more and more traditional campus-based universities are participating in the OEP movement in recent years. Lane (2012) points out that many HE institutions now "worry about widening access of participation in HE study because national and international education policy has long recognized that levels of participation and attainment produce social and economic benefits (p. 135)". Simply put, there has been a top-down national/social push on universities to widen the participation in their institutions among diverse groups of students (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds). In the context, many universities feel pressured to respond to the push by *doing something*—and more and more universities seem to decide to do OEPs since "at relatively little additional cost, universities can make their content available to millions. This content has the potential to substantially improve the quality of life of learners around the world (Caswell, Henson, Jensen, & Wiley, 2008, p. 1)".

Those universities participating in OEPs tend to much stress their altruistic motives, while the strategic motives (or their own benefits) are left unrepresented, in their narratives about the purpose of their OEPs. Similarly, the competitive pressure (or top-down push) that makes the universities "worry" tends to be replaced by justice-oriented statements about societal responsibilities and the spirit of openness that are proactively embraced by the universities:

As one of Taiwan's leading universities, NTU is known for its high-quality teaching, learning resources, and richness of course content. NTU also *shares societal responsibilities* in providing quality education, conducting higher level research, and promoting open education models for others to follow. Inspired by and *joining the world-wide open education mission*, NTU adopted the OCW concept to promote open education and to share knowledge by making educational resources available through the Internet. (Sheu & Shih, 2017, p. 101)

Popular narratives about the positive effects of particular OEPs on certain learner groups further support institutional narratives of why they are participating in the OEP movement:

OCW can be an important tool to increase or widen participation in formal higher education, especially in supporting a return to formal education by lifelong learners. Learners access openly available educational resources for informal study in very large numbers, indicating a widespread and pervasive need for continued learning opportunities. (Carson et al., 2012, p. 30)

These two types of narratives above are often paired and presented together in the selected papers, to promoting an altruistic picture of the purpose of OEPs. Even the small number of papers including more comprehensive narratives about the purpose of OEPs tend to naively suggest that doing OEPs is good for all, or that it is a win-win situation for both providers and beneficiaries. That is, the mandatory nature of OEPs in current HE contexts and potential benefits to universities are not explicitly discussed in those papers. At the same time, although some authors simply list all the benefits and positive outcomes of OEPs to multiple actors (including universities), it is also challenging to achieve all those benefits (or both altruistic and strategic purposes) at the same time. For example, Law and Perryman (2017) rightly point out the potentially conflicting nature of altruistic and strategic motives for OEPs:

The notion that business model and social mission for OER should sit uncomfortably side by side is identified by Sir John Daniel, who states that a 'basic paradox is between the laudable desire, in the spirit of the OER movement… to make knowledge the common property of humankind, and to find a business model that generates money for doing it' (p. 6)

The findings from this review are insufficient to further unpack the paradoxical situations. Yet, they are sufficient enough to call for the scholarly community to have deeper reflections on their OEPs and underlying motives for them.

4. Conclusion

This article analysed scholarly narratives about OEPs in online HE settings and answered a simple but critical question of "who opens online HE to whom, and for what?". The results suggest that the social mission to "make education for all" has become a shared task for all HE institutions. Despite the strong ideal of openness clearly running through all of the narratives, however, there is a lack of clear understanding of the actual purposes and processes of there OEPs. Particularly to many campus-based universities, OEP seems like a mandatory but add-on practice—one of many additional and marginal tasks they need to do. Although those universities clearly embrace the social agenda and rhetoric driving OEP initiatives, their ultimate interests are not to serve the disadvantaged. Thus, doing so is usually undertaken by a small number of individual faculty members who are especially enthusiastic and dedicated to OEPs. However, for OEP to become a core practice of higher educators, institutional level of administrative (or legal) and pedagogical supports are required. The review results indicate that the OEP process is far more complex, involving multiple opening and supporting actors, than how it commonly appears in the scholarly narratives as a simple process of "universities make OERs".

While it is challenging for OEP to be the core task of campus-based universities, it seems equally challenging for open universities to keep their original focus on serving the underserved. Despite their relatively long history of providing educational opportunities to the disadvantaged and supporting their learning experiences, their unique identity of being "open" and specialised in "distance" teaching has been challenged and weakened—in current online HE situations where everyone (every university) does online HE and OEPs (Lee, 2020). As the review results also suggest, more articles are written in campus-based university settings rather than in distance university contexts. Consequently, there are considerably a small number of papers focusing on the disadvantaged as the actual beneficiaries of their OEPs beyond simply mentioning the disadvantaged as potential users of the certain OERs at an abstract level. That is, the stronger the education for "all" rhetoric becomes, the weaker the original focus of distance education on serving "the disadvantaged" seems to become. In the same vein, while more actors in HE are talking about doing OEP, it is less clear who is actually doing it for the disadvantaged (Lee, 2019).

Despite the rather negative tone of the author's conclusion, it is worthwhile to state that the ultimate purpose of the article is not to criticise or discourage the OEP efforts made by multiple actors in online HE contexts. Instead, it is the intention to re-examine the nature of today's OEPs and to further develop a comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness; and thereby demonstrate the limitations of product-oriented OEP approaches. By doing so, the author hopes to facilitate more meaningful conversations about OEPs among online educators and, ultimately, to improve the quality of our collective efforts to provide educational opportunities to the disadvantaged and better

support their success in online HE. Most urgently, this article suggests that we re-direct our

educational and scholarly focus on those need to be better served; in particular, towards more

empirical studies with real-life stories of OEPs and the disadvantaged are much welcome.

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Zhou, M. (2016). Chinese university students' acceptance of MOOCs: A self-determination perspective. *Computers & Education*, *92*, 194-203.

Appendix A. A full list of reviewed articles

1	Zhou, M. (2016). Chinese university students' acceptance of MOOCs: A self-determination perspective. *Computers & Education*, *92*, 194-203. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.10.012
2	Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2013). Delivering unprecedented access to learning through podcasting as OER, but who's listening? A profile of the external iTunes U user. *Computers & Education*, *67*, 121-129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2013.03.008
3	Karunanayaka, S. P., & Naidu, S. (2018). Designing capacity building of educators in open educational resources integration leads to transformational change. *Distance Education*, *39*(1), 87-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1413933
4	Law, P., & Perryman, L. A. (2017). How OpenLearn supports a business model for OER. *Distance Education*, *38*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1299558

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5	Andersen, R., & Ponti, M. (2014). Participatory pedagogy in an open educational course: challenges and opportunities. *Distance education*, *35*(2), 234-249. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2014.917703
6	Murphy, A. (2013). Open educational practices in higher education: Institutional adoption and challenges. *Distance Education*, *34*(2), 201-217. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2013.793641
7	Bossu, C., Bull, D., & Brown, M. (2012). Opening up Down Under: the role of open educational resources in promoting social inclusion in Australia. *Distance Education*, *33*(2), 151-164. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2012.692050
8	Lane, A. (2012). A review of the role of national policy and institutional mission in European Distance Teaching Universities with respect to widening participation in higher education study through open educational resources. *Distance Education*, *33*(2), 135-150. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2012.692067
9	Hockings, C., Brett, P., & Terentjevs, M. (2012). Making a difference—inclusive learning and teaching in higher education through open educational resources. *Distance Education*, *33*(2), 237-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2012.692066
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12	Heller, R. F., Strobl, J., & Madhok, R. (2019). Online Education for Public Health Capacity Building in Low-to Middle-Income Countries: The Peoples-uni Experience. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *20*(1). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v20i1.3927
13	Chib, A., & Wardoyo, R. J. (2018). Differential OER impacts of formal and informal ICTs: Employability of female migrant workers. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *19*(3). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v19i3.3538
14	Blackmon, S. (2018). MOOC makers: Professors' experiences with developing and delivering MOOCs. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *19*(4). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v19i4.3718
15	Panda, S., & Santosh, S. (2017). Faculty perception of openness and attitude to open sharing at the Indian National Open University. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *18*(7). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i7.2942
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17	Gil-Jaurena, I., Callejo-Gallego, J., & Agudo, Y. (2017). Evaluation of the UNED MOOCs implementation: Demographics, learners' opinions and completion rates. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *18*(7). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i7.3155
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22	Young, S. S. C., & Hung, H. C. (2014). Coping with the challenges of open online education in Chinese societies in the mobile era: NTHU OCW as a case study. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *15*(3). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v15i3.1742CopiedAn error has occurred
23	Okonkwo, C. A. (2012). A needs assessment of ODL educators to determine their effective use of open educational resources. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *13*(4), 293-312. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i4.1316
24	Carson, S., Kanchanaraksa, S., Gooding, I., Mulder, F., & Schuwer, R. (2012). Impact of OpenCourseWare publication on higher education participation and student recruitment. *The

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	International Review Of Research In Open And Distributed Learning, *13*(4), 19-32. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i4.1238
25	Wright, C. R., & Reju, S. (2012). Developing and deploying OERs in sub-Saharan Africa: Building on the present. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *13*(2), 181-220. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i2.1185
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27	Wilson, T. (2008). New Ways of Mediating Learning: Investigating the implications of adopting open educational resources for tertiary education at an institution in the United Kingdom as compared to one in South Africa. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v9i1.485
28	Caswell, T., Henson, S., Jensen, M., & Wiley, D. Open educational resources: Enabling universal education (2008). *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v9i1.469
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