Journal of Learning for Development – JL4D

ISSN: 2311-1550

Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 47-61

A Critical Look at the Policy Environment for Opening up Public Higher Education in Rwanda

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Abstract: Policies play a critical role in the implementation of open, distance education and opening up higher education. To encourage participation of different stakeholders in related practices, policies may need to embody values and benefits for those stakeholders. It is in this perspective that this study was conducted to investigate the policy environment for opening up public higher education in Rwanda. An interview was conducted with a leader/policy maker at the University of Rwanda and three policy documents were analyzed. Results indicated that existing policies were unlikely to inform practices that contribute to opening up higher education. Related policy documents were decontextualized in some aspects. Different ways in which these policies may be contextualized to inform opening up higher education were recommended. The findings and recommendations are particularly important to policy makers and institutional leaders who are interested in opening up higher education in Rwanda and other settings.

Keywords: Policy, Opening up Education, Higher Education, Rwanda, Contextualization.

Introduction

Despite Article 26 of the United Nations' (1948) universal declaration of human rights that champions equally accessible and merit-based higher education, this level of education tends to be an exclusive privilege in many countries. The growing demand for higher education access (Commonwealth of Learning & UNESCO, 2011) does not match the rate of the development of the physical infrastructure needed to accommodate all people who wish to attend higher education institutions. Sir John Daniel observes that to respond to the rising demand for higher education access, three or four universities with a capacity of at least 30,000 students each needed to be built on a weekly basis between 2011 and 2025 (Mandell & Travers, 2012). In the context of Rwanda, the situation evolved in the opposite direction: Seven public higher education institutions that existed in 2010 were merged into the University of Rwanda, which was established in September 2013 as the only public higher education institution in the country.

The combination of all public higher education institutions in Rwanda paralleled the decrease of funds for student loans and government sponsorship. The shortage of funds for public higher education, student loans and government sponsorship exacerbated inequalities in terms of access to higher education. In June 2015, a senior official at the University of Rwanda was cited in a local online magazine announcing that only about half of 11,788 students who had been admitted at the University of Rwanda were able to register and attend classes, and others did not register due to financial difficulties (Igihe, 2015, para 3). The University of Rwanda's (2015a) statistics indicate that 6756 students (57.3 percent of the 11,788 students who had been admitted, according to Igihe, 2015) registered and attended classes in 2014/2015. Students who were unable to register and attend classes

had been denied student loans and could not afford higher education without them. These underprivileged learners had been admitted at the university based on their high performance in national examinations at the end of their secondary education.

Despite the inability to include a huge number of underprivileged learners in the higher education system, political rhetoric has been advancing open, distance education and eLearning among key priorities. The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (Ministry of Education, 2010) and the executive summary of the Seven Year Government Programme (7YGP) (Government of Rwanda, no date) contain typical examples of such rhetoric. In the latter document, the projection was to provide 50 percent of higher education and 30 percent of secondary education via Open, Distance Education and eLearning (ODeL) by 2017 (Government of Rwanda, ibid, p. 166).

Related projects and initiatives have been progressing slowly, despite the growing need. In 2012/2013, Rwanda's Ministry of Education appointed a Task Force and Working Group on a project that was expected to contribute to opening up higher education in the country (Mukama et al., 2013). Despite a handover of the project to the University of Rwanda, there has been no indicator of its implementation. In September 2014, the Higher Education Council (HEC) launched a call for consultancy to develop a strategy to deliver academic programmes via ODeL (Higher Education Council, 2014). In this consultancy, the HEC outlines the intention in three points:

- adopt ODeL at the rate of 50 percent in conventional tertiary education
- provide an opportunity for potential students who have not been included in conventional higher education due to family and professional commitments
- find an alternative cost-effective academic pathway for students who cannot afford expensive conventional academic programmes.

The rhetoric on open and distance learning that permeates some official documents at the ministerial and government levels did not seem to be matched by related enabling policies and, more importantly, practices, at the institutional level. It is in this context that an extensive investigation on opening up higher education in Rwanda was conducted as part of a Ph.D study. The study had a transformative design and consisted of two major components: 1) a research component and 2) a parallel development component (the latter is beyond the scope of the current paper). The research component investigated potential enablers to opening up higher education in five sub-components: 1) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), 2) open educational resources (OER), 3) open learning practices (OLP) 4), open educational practices (OEP), and 5) policies that are developed to enable OLP and OEP. While the data related to MOOCs were already published in Nkuyubwatsi (2016a), data related to OER, OLP and OEP will be published in the future. In the current paper, only research and findings related to enabling policies are reported and discussed.

Open Education

According to Mulder & Jansen (2015), open education emerged in the nineteenth century but it widely developed in the second half of the twentieth century with the start of open universities. Open education is defined differently across settings depending on the agendas behind the use of the concept of openness. Weller (2011, p. 96) discusses two main agendas promoted in open higher education: the open access agenda which is relevant in countries where access to higher education is

low and the lifelong learning agenda which became the focus of attention in developed countries as access to higher education increased.

Agbu et al. (2016, pp. 112-113) distinguish classical openness used in the long-standing tradition of open universities from digital openness reflected in Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). According to the authors, the concept of "open" as used in "open universities" may refer to a diversity of aspects: 1) open entry (no formal requirements), 2) freedom of time, 3) freedom of place, 4) freedom of pace, 5) open programming, and 6) open to all people and target groups. Agbu et al. (ibid) argue that no single open university around the world is open in all these aspects.

Given the diversity of societal issues (from country to country) that Open, Distance Education and eLearning (ODeL) and open education may help address, it is inappropriate to impose a universal frame within which the two concepts are defined. Instead, flexibility that enables institutions to position themselves in a unique way vis-à-vis openness may help them respond to issues that prevail in their respective societies. It may be difficult to find a fully open ODeL course/programme/ institution that is independent from open access (openly licensed content and open courses) and does not embrace the many aspects of openness discussed earlier. In many cases, "open" in the ODL acronym is interchangeable with "online", as in "online and distance education". However, online programmes and courses are not necessarily open in many aspects of openness as open and distance learning programmes would be.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) may be a good example of an institution that recently decided to fully incorporate open access in its ODeL practices. This university combined classical openness and digital openness to position itself as the first "all-inclusive OER-based open university" (Agbu et al., 2016, p. 111). Fourteen years after its start (the university was founded in 2002), the NOUN enrolls 455,837 students (Agbu et al. ibid, p. 112). Opposite to the NOUN's fast growth, some incumbent open universities have recently been in crisis (Bates, 2015) or experienced decline in student enrollment (Parr, 2015).

The most successful initiative that may enable open(ing up) higher education may have been publishing research articles or books under an open licence. Through open licences, permissions to legally access, download, store, use, reuse, redistribute, and often, adapt full texts of the articles or books are granted. These permissions enable a cost-free reuse of the content in education across settings. Yet, some of the routes through which this publication is made are questionable as discussed in the following section. Mulder & Jansen (2015) argue that the concept of openness has been interpreted in a diversity of justified and questionable ways, which may be why some of the routes through which publishing under an open licence occurs can be disputed.

Publishing Research Articles and Books Under an Open Licence

Weller (2014, p. 7) distinguishes three routes to publish under an open licence: the *Platinum route*, the *Gold route* and the *Green route*. In the *Platinum route*, an article is published with an open licence and the author or her/his institution is not required to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs). The *Platinum route* is open to both the author and the users of the content. It distributes power and benefits between institutions, authors and publishers (Nkuyubwatsi et al., 2015), which makes this route more collaborative and widely beneficial. This route is particularly beneficial to authors who do

not have access to research funds for covering APCs, especially those in under-resourced settings. These authors only contribute the content for free and APCs come from other contributors / collaborators. Institutions also benefit most from this route in that they can access and use the open content from the day of publication without any cost, neither on their part nor on the part of any other member of their respective communities.

In the *Gold route*, an article is published under an open licence, but the author or her/his institution is required to pay APCs. This makes this route open only to the end users; the partial openness that is often achieved by penalizing authors. From the author's perspective, this route may be the least beneficial. By default, the *Gold route* shifts the financial burden from other players to the author who also contributes the content for free (Nkuyubwatsi et al., 2015). If the author does not work for an institution that pays APCs and does not have access to research funds that cover these charges, the *Gold route* may be prohibitive. On the other hand, if the author's institution pays APCs, the cost may be recovered by charging more fees from learners and, therefore, tuition fee may increase. High cost of educational resources was indeed one of the key justifications for the tuition fee increase advanced by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Free State (Jansen, 2015) when South Africa was stirred by the October 2015 #FeeMustFall student protest that ended with a zero increase on tuition fees. Raising tuition fees to recover either the cost of educational content published under *All-rights-reserved* or APCs constitutes a barrier to opening up higher education.

As for the *Green route*, an article is published under *All-rights-reserved*, but its earlier version, which was edited in the light of feedback from reviewers is uploaded to author's websites, or her/his institution's repository, with an open licence. Publishers may impose an embargo for a specific period before the author can release the version under an open licence. In this way, the *Green route* still offers excessive power to publishers. There has recently been an attempt to increase the embargo period in some publishing companies, which led to a boycott and dissatisfaction in academic communities in some countries (Wild, 2015; Wijkhuijs, 2015; Ramaker & Wijkhuijs, 2015). From the perspective of end users, the *Green route* may be the least open of the three routes through which publishing under an open licence occurs. Although this route does not charge institutions and authors to publish their content, the embargo imposed by publishers inhibits the authors and institutions from openly sharing, accessing and using the content without cost for a specific period.

The Increase of Openly Licensed Resources and Lack of Evidence of their Impact

Despite an increase of academic journal articles and books published under an open licence, their use has been far below expectations (Conole, 2013; Ouwehand, 2012; Glennie, Harley & Butcher, 2012; Ehlers, 2011). The low level of use of OER seems to have been caused by institutions' openness in limited aspects that are not enough to create value for intended users. Findings in Nkuyubwatsi (2016b) indicate that when value is created, some learners hunt for and engage with learning resources and transformative outcomes accrue.

The related literature emphasized that barriers to OER adoption and engagement in open courses by learners include the lack of recognition of related learning accomplishment (Lane & Van Dorp, 2011; Yuan & Powell, 2013; Kopp, Ebner, & Dofer-Novak, 2014; Mulder, 2015). On their part, academics have been discouraged by the lack of formal recognition of OER and related OEP as standard

academic practices (OECD, 2007) and the lack of incentives or rewards for OER production, use and sharing (Hylén, no date; OECD, 2007; McAndrew et al., 2012; Woert, 2012; Wolfenden, 2012).

From *Open Education* to *Opening up Education*

Limited openness and the consequent failure to use OER for making higher education accessible to more learners who have not been serviced (especially those in under-resourced settings), led to a move from open education to opening up education. Opening up education values not only OER, but also other enablers, such as assessment of open learning for credit, open educational services, policies that encourage OLP and OEP, etc. It moves beyond access to, and use of, openly licensed content for the benefit of only those who already have or have had access to education (formal students and lifelong learners who have university qualifications). Opening up education considers services that may enable assessment of accomplishment from open learning based on openly licensed content for credit. Such services would enable accommodation of dedicated open learners who work hard to meet requirements for credit and different qualifications. Awarding such open learners credit and qualifications would end the discrimination they encounter when they are denied opportunities, such as employment and funds for further education, not least because, in most cases, formal qualifications are posed as a precondition to access these opportunities in Rwanda.

Services related to assessment of open learning for credit and supporting open learning are often referred to as *open educational services* (Ouwehand, 2012) or *open learning services* (Mulder & Janssen, 2013, p. 36). Unlike *open education* that seems to only focus on openly licensed content, *opening up education* may be informed by an agenda to use the openly licensed content and open educational services to create value for open learners. In an attempt to move beyond the status-quo of *open education*, Mulder (2015) developed a framework of five components for opening up education (5COE model) that consists of 1) OER, 2) openness to learners' needs, 3) open learning services, 4) open teaching efforts and 5) openness to employability and capabilities development (Figure 1). The 5COE model may not comprehensively cover all ingredients needed for opening up higher education, but it provides a better starting point than limiting attention to openly licensed content.

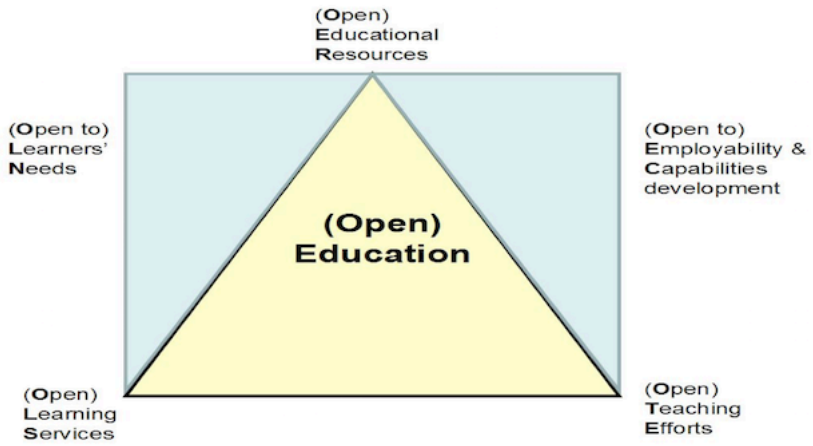

Figure 1: Five components of open(ing up) education: 5COE Model (Mulder, 2015).

The current study focused on the willingness of leaders and policy makers to develop policies that embody values that would catalyze academics' contribution to openly licensed content and open

educational services as well as learners' engagement in open learning. Such value creation would help move from the good intentions expressed in various official documents to a real open education system in which any learner who is willing to engage in open learning, regardless of her/his social, economic, ethnic and regional background, becomes empowered on the basis of the limited resources s/he can access. At the heart of the study, there was a problem of an increasing number of potential learners who are denied student loans in Rwanda and are therefore not included in the higher education system.

Research Methods

Research on the *enabling policy* sub-component was conducted in the light of the research question, "*To what extent are the University of Rwanda's leaders/policy makers willing to develop an institutional open education policy and strategy that recognizes academics' open educational practices/roles and credibly certify competencies developed via self-determined open learning?*" The University of Rwanda was the focus of the study because it constitutes the entire public higher education system in Rwanda. Moreover, a project on open and opening up higher education had been transferred, and responsibilities to coordinate the development of a national policy on open, distance education and eLearning were delegated, to this institution.

An interview with a leader/policy maker at the University of Rwanda was conducted. The informant was in a unique position in that she was a critical decision maker on publications that lead to academics' promotions. Her influence and decisions may motivate or discourage publishing under an open licence. This positioned her as a key informant for the relevance of data on OEP related to publishing academic content under an open licence. For this reason, the informant was sampled *purposively* (Bryman, 2012, p. 418) or *purposefully* (Creswell, 2014, p. 189).

An interview protocol was used to guide the researcher. Prior to the use of this instrument, it was sent to experts for critical feedback. The experts confirmed that the data that could be gathered using the protocol could help answer the research question. Having this research instrument checked by experts added *face validity* (Bryman, 2012, p. 171) to the research. Bryman (*ibid*) argues that face validity, which is the apparent reflection of the content in the data collection questions, can be achieved by asking people who are experienced or have expertise in the field to judge if the measure appears to reflect the concept concerned or the focus of attention. One of the experts who made such judgment had experience in researching the field of open education.

The *participant's information sheet* and *informed consent form* were emailed to the informant one day before the interview date. In the interview session, the researcher followed Cohen, Manion, & Morrison's (2011) guidelines: Before the interview, the researcher informed the informant of the purpose, the nature and the likely duration of the interview session. Then, the researcher sought a written and signed informed consent from the informant before switching on the recording device. During the session, the researcher took notes on the interview protocol. At the end of the session, further notes on how the interview went were taken and initial reflection on information collected was recorded. The interview recording was transcribed and the transcript was used for analysis.

Validity and reliability of the interview data were ensured by comparing and contrasting data collected in the *enabling policy* sub-component to data from other sources. These sources were mainly participants in other sub-components of the research component mentioned earlier. Denscombe

(2010) recommends checking whether the interview information is corroborated by other people or other sources—a practice he also refers to as *triangulation* (p. 189). Cohen et al. (2011, p. 204) refer to this triangulation as *concurrent validity*. Denscombe (ibid) went further and cautioned against taking interview data at face value if it is possible to confirm or dispute statements using other sources. It is in this perspective that interview data were contrasted to the data from three policy documents that the informant highlighted during the session and data from other sources that were collected for the broader Ph.D study.

Extracts of the interview data report and discussion were shared with the informant. The researcher requested the informant to check if the extracts were accurate and point out anything that needed to be amended. The informant was given a period of one month for amendment suggestions. No issue was raised and no suggestions for amendment were made.

Data were also collected from four published policy documents the informant highlighted. The policy documents were selected on the basis of their potential to have been drafted, or to be reviewed, to include values and benefits that would activate interest in different OLP and OEP that are critical for opening up higher education. In other words, the documents selected were perceived to have the most potential to convey relevant policies for enabling opening up higher education. Hence, the relevance of data, rather than the number of data sources, was critical and informed the selection of policy documents that were analyzed.

Results

At the beginning of the interview session, the informant highlighted a list of existing policy documents, which the researcher subsequently analyzed for identification of any intention to recognize academics' OEP and credibly certify accomplishment from self-determined open learning practices. While data from the interview session may only reflect the perspectives of a single informant, policy documents were expected to have been published after different leaders/policy makers had contributed their input and endorsed the published versions. On the basis of their relevance, three of the four policy documents analyzed are featured in the current paper: 1) The *open access policy and procedures*, 2) the *general academic regulations for open and distance learning programmes*, and 3) the *policy and procedures on academic staff appointments and promotions*.

The Open Access Policy and Procedures (The University of Rwanda, 2015b)

This policy document was analyzed with the intention of identifying any willingness to formally recognize academics' contribution to openly licensed resources and assess accomplishment from self-determined open learning practices for credit. In this document, a commitment to the promotion of open access publishing for the sake of providing and improving wider access to the scholarly and research output of the University of Rwanda is expressed. The policy and procedures are inspired by the 2003 *Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities*. The University of Rwanda became a signatory of this declaration on 24 November 2014. A commitment to make research output freely available and accessible in ways that permit its use for the benefit of a wider society is also expressed in this policy document (p. 2).

Moreover, the University of Rwanda expresses its commitment to encourage researchers to publish in open access journals in this policy document. Preference for the *Green route* is highlighted, but the university also expresses its intention to support the *Gold route* if it is appropriate and resources are

available. The *Platinum route* is not referred to in this policy document, but it is conflated with the *Gold route*. According to this policy document, an article published within the *Gold route* "can be published in an open access journal free of charge or after payment of article processing charges (APC), depending on conditions of the publisher" (p. 1). Therefore, the *Gold route* in the University of Rwanda's context means both the *Platinum* and the *Gold* routes (Weller, 2014, p. 7).

The General Academic Regulations for Open and Distance Learning Programmes (The University of Rwanda, 2014a)

These regulations were supposedly produced to guide open and distance learning practices at the University of Rwanda. The related policy document was analyzed with the intention of identifying any willingness to assess accomplishment from self-determined open learning practices for credit. Recognition of academics' open educational services related to assessment of accomplishment from self-determined open learning for credit may also be reflected in this policy document. Article 31 stipulates that registration will occur at the beginning of each module rather than per academic year as is done in the conventional education system. Nevertheless, Article 48 states that readmission is on a semesterly basis. In Article 88, the guidelines require 85 percent attendance at seminars, practical sessions, tutorials and face-to-face sessions in order to pass a module (p. 15). The regulations do not address assessment of open learning accomplishment for credit, open educational services and other OEP as well as the use of openly licensed learning resources and open courses.

The Policy and Procedures on Academic Staff Appointments and Promotions (The University of Rwanda, 2014b)

Recognition of academics' engagement in OEP may also be reflected in their appointment and promotion, which justifies why the related policy document was of interest in the current study. The policy and procedures classify accomplishments that lead to academic promotions (and appointments) in five clusters: 1) research, 2) teaching in higher education, 3) knowledge transfer/income generation, 4) academic administration or management and 5) outreach to business and community (p. 3). They also mention that accelerated promotion may be possible when applicants exceed the performance criteria of the level they wish to be promoted to (p. 5). Yet, criteria for accelerated promotion are highlighted only on the promotion to a senior lecturer level (p. 23). On promotion to different academic grades, a minimum of three years from the previous promotion is required.

The policy and procedures also mention the contribution of curation in academic promotion (p. 16). Nevertheless, no more clarifications on the kind of curation and conditions under which this practice contributes to promotion are provided. Equally, the policy and procedures highlight the contribution of pedagogic innovation (p. 33) without specifying such innovation. Neither are criteria for judging pedagogic innovations that contribute to academic promotion clarified.

In this policy document, it was stated that inventions, innovation and participation in activities that have impact on social and economic development are considered for promotion. However, a related note highlighted that these activities should contribute to economic and/or civic development of Scotland (rather than that of Rwanda):

> NOTE: These activities would normally be expected to lead to the production of a variety of types of published work (including monographs, CD ROMs, textbooks, refereed and other articles, seminar

> papers, practice protocol, consultancy reports, etc.), **and/or** artefacts, patents, spin out companies and licensing agreements **and/or** national/internal invitations to make presentations, lead workshops and/or act as an advisor and/or successful strategic partnership projects with industry and/or the community which contribute towards the economic and/or civic development of Scotland and beyond.
>
> The University of Rwanda (2014b, p. 37)

Beyond Policy Documents

Similar to the analysis of policy documents, the interview analysis focused on any indicator of the willingness to recognize academics' engagement in OEP. Different themes emerged in the analysis of the interview recording. The current article focuses on two themes: 1) *raising awareness and encouraging open access publishing* and 2) *a monopoly on access to "open" electronic resources*.

1) Raising awareness and encouraging open access publishing

Despite an explicit expression of commitment to promote open access publishing and encourage researchers to publish their research articles in open access journals, the interview with a University of Rwanda official revealed a different attitude. When asked about her position vis-à-vis raising awareness of an open access publishing route that does not charge a publication fee, the informant responded as follow: "we do not focus really on open access or not… we would like our staff to publish in credible journals… whether they are open access or not, it doesn't matter as far as we are concerned". The researcher probed by asking if there are open access academic journals that are credible and the informant admitted that some of the open access journals are highly credible.

The researcher shared with the informant the issue raised by an academic at the University of Rwanda who had an article published in an academic journal after giving away the copyright. The academic was lamenting that his students and he could not access, use and share the article without paying a fee. The informant insisted that it was the authors' choice to publish under such conditions because they believe such journals are prestigious. This was the same response as when the informant was asked if charging academics money to publish in open access journals discourages authors from openly sharing the outcome of their work.

To publish one article in an open access journal, an academic at the University of Rwanda may be required to pay as much as the sum of his/her six-month salary. This was the case of one journal that had accepted a manuscript of the academic who was unhappy for not being able to access, use and share his published article. This academic had invited the researcher to co-author that article, but the invitation was declined after the researcher noticed that the journal publisher exhibited a predatory attitude: it charged exorbitant APCs. In the interview, the researcher went further and highlighted that academics at the University of Rwanda may be making decisions to publish with such journals because they do not have information on an alternative open access publishing route that does not require the payment of APCs. The informant's response was, "You know, we have not really taken trouble ourselves to teach them about that". However, the informant acknowledged that such awareness can be raised.

2) Monopoly on access to "open" electronic resources

The informant argued that the issue of main concern at the University of Rwanda is not access to the content, but the lack of a culture of reading. She revealed that the university has access to more than

33,000 electronic resources, which are not used beyond the rate of two percent. These resources are paid by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), according to the informant. A probe revealed that those resources are only accessible to learners who are affiliated with the University of Rwanda and 58 other institutions, or the National Library, which accesses the resources through the university.

Discussion

The literature on OER and MOOCs highlighted the importance of assessment of accomplishment from open learning for credit among potential enablers of learners' adoption of the resources, and for their engagement in the courses (Lane & Van Dorp, 2011; Yuan & Powell, 2013; Kopp et al., 2014). Intention to support such assessment was, however, not identified in the current study. Neither could the recognition of academics' engagement in OEP be identified. According to OECD (2007), the lack of formal recognition of OER related practices inhibits adoption of these resources. Other inhibitors to the adoption of OER and related practices are the lack of motivation due to low salaries (Badarch, Knyazeva & Lane, 2012) and the lack of incentives or rewards for OER production, use and sharing (Hylén, no date; OECD, 2007; McAndrew et al., 2012; Woert, 2012; Wolfenden, 2012). Different University of Rwanda policy documents do not clearly envisage how academics would be motivated and incentivized to engage in such practices.

While having the *open access policy* and *procedures* is a starting point for raising awareness of open and opening up higher education, the *Platinum route*—that is of financial benefit to academics at the University of Rwanda and the university in general—is not included in the related policy document. The lack of awareness of the *Platinum route* that is open to both authors and users of the published content exposes the University of Rwanda and its academics to vanity and predatory publishers. Such publishers find a safe haven in the *Gold route* (Nkuyubwatsi et al., 2015). Some academics at the University of Rwanda have already been targeted by predatory publishers, as highlighted earlier. Therefore, the University of Rwanda's *Open Access Policy and Procedures* (The University of Rwanda, 2015b) may need to be contextualized in order to catalyze safe and cost-free OEP among academics. This contextualization may be achieved by replacing the *Gold route*, that exposes the university and its academics to predatory and vanity publishers and penalizes them for their open sharing practices, with the *Platinum route* that is safe and requires no publication fee.

For its part, the *general academic regulations for open and distance learning programmes* policy document seems to have been inspired by practices in conventional education. This policy document lacks critical ingredients that may enable opening up higher education: 1) the use of openly licensed content in open learning and supporting this type of learning, 2) assessment of accomplishment from open learning for credit (Lane & Van Dorp, 2011; Yuan & Powell, 2013; Kopp et al., 2014; Mulder, 2015) and 3) recognition of academics' OEP that could counter the issue of low level of adoption of these resources in academia (Conole, 2013; Ouwehand, 2012; Glennie et al., 2012; Ehlers, 2011). Relevant OEP may include the contribution and use of openly licensed content in supporting learning (Hylén, no date; OECD, 2007; McAndrew et al., 2012; Woert, 2012; Wolfenden, 2012) and assessment of accomplishment from open learning for credit, as discussed earlier. Hence, the inclusion of these three ingredients may contextualize the regulations to enable accommodation of the underprivileged learners, discussed in the introduction, who are willing to engage in open learning practices.

As for the policy and procedures on academic staff appointments and promotions, it still contained a statement that is relevant to academics in Scotland rather than those in Rwanda (The University of Rwanda, 2014b, p. 37). The decontextualized statement hints at the *copy and paste* practice in the production of this policy document. Contextualization of this policy may need to identify specific issues in Rwandan higher education and design a policy that aims at enabling academics' engagement in addressing these issues.

Academics in Rwanda should be promoted because they have contributed to civic and economic development of Rwanda, not that of Scotland. Avoiding financial losses incurred by predatory and vanity publishers to Rwandan academics and institutions may contribute to economic and civic development of Rwanda. This economic/civic development may also result from adoption of OEP for the inclusion and empowerment of more underprivileged Rwandan learners in the higher education system. These learners constitute an important component of the workforce and human capital in Rwanda, to which value needs to be added: empowerment through education.

The interview informant's argument that the issue of main concern is not access to the learning content but a low level of the use of the electronic resources the University of Rwanda has access to can be challenged in many ways. Access to those resources requires affiliation with a higher education institution. This affiliation may be considered as a *threshold for accessing knowledge* (Weller, 2011, p. 7) conveyed in the content. According to Weller (*ibid*), the digitization and online availability of the content removes the threshold to access knowledge. This has, however, not been the case at the University of Rwanda. As discussed in introduction, 42.7 percent of learners admitted at this university based on their high performance in national exams were unable to register and attend higher education in 2014/2015, because they had been denied student loans. Therefore, affiliation with this university, which is established as a threshold to access the electronic resources, was denied to these underprivileged learners.

If the cost to access the resources is paid by SIDA on behalf of the University of Rwanda, as the interview informant highlighted, it is inappropriate to refer to those resources as *open*. Referring to such resources as *open* may be one of the questionable ways the concept of *openness* has been used (Mulder & Jansen, 2015). In the context of open education, open resources often refer to openly licensed materials (UNESCO, 2012). If the electronic resources at the University of Rwanda were openly licensed in a way that allows derivative work, the knowledge they convey could possibly be disseminated to underprivileged open learners using media accessible or affordable to those learners.

The lack of a reading culture advanced to justify why the resources are not used may be a trivial factor to successful learning when compared to the value learners perceive in the way their accomplishment is acknowledged. Learners are more likely to engage in open learning when their related accomplishment responds to their needs such as employability and capabilities development (Mulder, 2015). In the context of Rwanda, non-formal learners hunted learning resources, learned on their own, took national exams in attempt to get formal qualifications or score above cut-off points for student loans (Nkuyubwatsi, 2016b). Some of these non-formal learners did not surrender after failing on first and/or second attempts and retook national exams up to three times to meet the performance requirements for the award of the qualification or student loan they were after. The value that catalyzed learners' engagement in non-formal learning was the potential award of formal qualifications and student loans under same conditions as formal students.

In a similar way, the underprivileged learners who are excluded from the higher education system but are willing to engage in open learning based on openly licensed resources would be assessed and those who have developed competencies needed for qualifications would be awarded credit and qualifications as formal students are (Nkuyubwatsi, 2014 and 2016a). A lower fee for open educational services (Ouwehand; 2012; Mulder & Janssen, 2013; Nkuyubwatsi, 2014; Mulder, 2015) solicited and received by learners may be charged. This practice would, however, require an agenda to open up higher education (Nkuyubwatsi, 2016a), contextualized policies designed to enable related practices and open competency-based curricula.

Conclusion

The growing number of learners in need of higher education in Rwanda has not been serviced despite political rhetoric on the use of ODeL in the country. Real practices that open up higher education in this setting have been lacking, and existing policies seem not to have been developed to catalyze those practices. The different policy documents analyzed indicate a lack of critical ingredients for opening up higher education. Decontextualized in some of their components, these policies may discourage, rather than encourage, open learning practices (OLP) and open educational practices (OEP). The *open access policy and procedures* may be contextualized by replacing the *Gold route,* that exposes academics and institutions in Rwanda to vanity and predatory publishers, with the *Platinum route,* that is safe and is sensitive and responsive to financial difficulties in the country. The *general academic regulations for open and distance learning programmes* may be contextualized by adding critical enablers of opening up higher education: 1) the use of openly licensed content in open learning and supporting this type of learning, 2) assessment of accomplishment from open learning for credit and 3) recognition of academics' OEP. As for the policy and procedures on academic staff appointments and promotions, they may be contextualized by tailoring them to specific issues in Rwandan higher education, with an agenda to address them.

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