Opening education in the Middle East: <u>In-depth interviews</u> with experts in open education in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine.

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Introduction

This document presents the transcripts of in-depth interviews (N=7) conducted between February and March 2018 through Skype with open education experts, from seven universities: Alexandria University (Egypt), Cairo University (Egypt), German Jordanian University (Jordan), Princess Sumaya University of Technology (Jordan), Notre Dame University (Lebanon), Birzeit University (Palestine) and An-Najah University (Palestine). This data set is part of a study which aimed at identifying cultural barriers which might hinder the transition to open education in higher education in the Middle East, specifically in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. This study was conducted in the context of OpenMed (https://openmedproject.eu/), an international cooperation project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme of the European Union during the period 15 October 2015 – 14 October 2018. The interviews were conducted in English, digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The duration of the interviews varied from 33 minutes to 53 minutes.

The course "Open Education: fundamentals and approaches", produced within the OpenMed Project, aims to build capacity on Open Education and Open Educational Resources among universities in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Palestine:

- F. Nascimbeni, D. Burgos, A. Vetrò, E. Bassi, D. Villar-Onrubia, K. Winpenny, I. Maya Jariego, O. Mimi, R. Qasim, & C. Stefanelli (Eds.), *Open Education: fundamentals and approaches. A learning journey opening up teaching in higher education*. Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. [pdf]

Transcript of the In-Depth Interviews

Expert	University	Country	Date
OE Expert #1	PSUT, Princess Sumaya University for Technology	Jordan	19/02/2018
OE Expert #2	Cairo University	Egypt	20/02/2018
OE Expert #3	Notre Dame Univeristy-Louaize	Lebanon	26/02/2018
OE Expert #4	GJU, German Jordanian University	Jordan	14/02/2018
OE Expert #5	Birzeit University	Palestine	27/02/2018
OE Expert #6	Alexandria University	Egypt	12/03/2018
OE Expert #7	An-Najah National University	Palestine	26/02/2018

1) Interview with Open Education Expert #1

University	PSUT, Princess Sumaya University for Technology
Country	Jordan
Date	19/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	43 minutes

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

> *Could you please tell me how you organized your learning groups since the beginning of the project?*

First thing I had in mind, is to get people who are really interested in open education, that is, being able to take a course online and the people who are interested in this type of teaching are very limited in Jordan. It has been hard to find people who are interested. Yet I was lucky enough to find instructors and technicians in our university. I ended up having seven in my learning circle. They are ranging from being instructors, doctors and technicians. My criteria were to get people who are really interested, who wanted to do this because they wanted not because they have to. Also, the variety of background. For instance, the technicians do not have a teaching experience but they have the experience of continuous learning. They are of a benefit to the eLearning centre here because they have the technical skills of dealing with the hardware and software, that would help us in our learning management system. The instructors are skilled in teaching face-to-face, but it was interesting to have this kind of experience: a student-based learning. Learning based on the students and how much they want to learn.

> *And did you know these already before the project? How did you go about finding these people?*

Three of them I already knew, hence using word-of-mouth. And the other four were by email. I had never met them before. I asked the presidency here and they gave me some suggestions, I went to introduce myself and now we became friends.

> *What were the major successes and challenges in coordinating your group?*

The first challenge was time. The scope of the programme is extended enough to handle how much they are busy or how much time they might have. The programme started back in September last year and the remaining of the summer last year and then we had the winter. You have to keep in mind that winter in Europe and the US, winter means it is a holiday season, there is Christmas. But it is not really the case in Jordan. We have some days for Christmas but not the whole week. For a Muslim majority country, they are still busy during the holiday season. I met with my group every month. We would sit down together. Some of them prefer to sit one by one meeting, rather than in a whole

group. These people decided to do their own projects individually. Another two wanted to work with each other. They worked on a module they created themselves. And the remaining, they are all individual projects. And after having multiple focus-group meeting, I ended up having various meetings using one-to-one style. I would say the time management was the challenge. The most productive period was before beginning of Fall semester 2017 and at the end of it. We are talking about this small vacation period between two semesters, which is about ten days. Whenever there is a vacation or a break from teaching, they had time to go back to their laptop and work. It was like a catch up with the material. I looked at the logfile and they all gather in this one model, of signing up one time, trying to do as much as you can and then I get back later to it, when I finish working. It was like two to three inputs and that´s it. For open education, it needs to be continuous cause otherwise you might forget some information. I asked them to dedicate one hour each week to the course to take benefit out of it.

> *Were there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?*

Specifically, for Jordan, there is a cultural challenge. Not only teachers think that online/open courses are not good enough to deliver knowledge, but also that's what the students think as well. But I think the solution begins with the teachers. I try to convince them how effective it is. It is based on capabilities, it saves a lot of costs for the university and on yourself. It is based on your home time capability. Students take their own pace. In our university, we created a whole PDU specifically to instruct teachers how to teach online. We firmly believe that the instructor is fundamental. They can guide the students, motivate them to take courses online.

> *Just to clarify, you said, you made a course for the teachers to instruct them how to teach online?*

Blended model; It was an online module and then I had to make face-to-face training.

> *Is this an initiative from the university to move online learning and OER?*

Yes. It is also worth mentioning that we are using the equipment that were partially purchased on the OpenMed project. OpenMed dedicated some budget for each university to purchase equipment, everything that you need to support the eLearning centre at our university and to present these devices to the teachers and them on how to use them. The second one is a technical challenge and the third one is policy making. Sometimes we face disconnection in the internet and therefore, we had to search for an internet service provider here in Jordan. We decided to go with a fibre link dedicated only to our centre. In this way, we make sure it is secure, fast and continuous. The last challenge is policy making. In Jordan, the ministry of higher education allows for each course to be taken as a blended model with 25% of it to be online. We try to get benefit out of it, in addition to the last policy they announced in Jordan: Three Jordanian universities are allowed to gather together and conduct a whole online programme and make it openly accessible for who wants to access it. This is a regulation that was conducted almost six years ago, but until this day, none of the universities in Jordan have sat down together and build this type of programme. Some of the universities are competitors, some are way busy with strengthening the structure and infrastructure that

they already have in their system. Once they feel they are ready, they can perhaps offer to work with other universities for online programmes.

In your learning group, where there any concerns in that they will be using and sharing OER?

Actually, they say they found everything relevant and informative. Most of them attended webinars. We used to conduct a webinar everything month, by having an external visitor to do a presentation and everybody would attend. In my learning circle, they commented that the webinars were the most effective tool during the course. They like it more than the assignments, the readings and even more than discussion board. Now I have to admit that the participation from my learning circle in discussion board was limited.

Do you think this is something cultural?

I think it is because the webinar shows a face and voice. I remember one of the comments I got from one of the participants in my learning circle. He told me that the discussion board is like Facebook, nothing different. I know they are very active in the webinars because they see a person, they can interact and ask them, and it is more live and authentic.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

Can you tell me a little bit about the role of OER in your university? How is your university promoting OER?

Since the beginning of OpenMed we are promoting OER. We passed a long way. The word has spread, the opinions have changed, people are beginning to accept online education. That is a really huge progress. That has happened over the past few years in a way that if we wanted to work this by ourselves, it would have taken decades. Technology is advancing really fast and we have to cope with it. In my role as a facilitator, I try to facilitate and guide my learning circle, keeping in mind that they are grown-up students. I cannot treat them as students and that is one of the cultural things that I have to highlight. Some of them are technicians, doctors and professors, and even with a higher rank than me. I treat them as partners. I am learning as well and I am here to help them. In addition to that, my position in the university is the director of the eLearning centre. I also teach a lot of courses in business and eMarketing.

In your university, do you normally speak in English?

Most of the instruction is in English. We give them placement exams that involves English.

In terms of international online courses, do you need to adapt it for the Jordan context?

For Jordan, any international course would work. Even though we are living in the middle east, each country in the middle east is different in terms of cultural perspectives. Here is an example, I worked before with the CSU for the Colorado

university in the US and they asked me to redesign a course that was provided for a Saudi university. We started to readapt the course by removing any female picture or video because they generally didn't want that in Saudi Arabia. That course was provided for male students. Until today, there they have segregation between male and female. If you are talking about Saudi Arabia it is totally different, limited internationalising in courses. In Jordan it is not the case. Even some of our students take online courses with Iraq, Iran. There is a lot of platforms called *itmodel*, people depend on some other course that was created by other people from the US or Europe.

> *Have you observed any barriers, which hinders the participation and learning experience in your learning groups? You mentioned internet connection, do you see any other barriers?*

Apart from technical issues and time, one of the main barriers is the personal opinion about this. Two of the adopters who took the course. They are not convinced about OER at all. They studied it, they read about it, but they are not convinced that it is a feasible model. We totally respect that. It is their opinion. But at the end, they took the course and learned about something before they say I agree or disagree. I think that is a positive barrier. It wasn't preventing them from learning.

Section 3: The role of the facilitator

> *Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?*

I am a computer engineer and a did a Master's degree in computer science. When I came to PhD, I went to educational technologies. This introduced me to the educational world. I think that's when the fuse happened between education and my technical background. This shift made me enthusiastic about online learning and eLearning, specifically how to design courses, because I am an instructional designer myself right now. In PSUT, we have been establishing the eLearning centre for 8 months and now we are in the second year of working on it.

> *Did you do your PhD abroad?*

Yes, in the US.

> *In way, you brought some internationalisation to your university with your knowledge?*

That´s correct. In the US, I have been in this field for more than 10 years and especially now, with what is happening with the combination of AI and big data into the eLearning system, it would cause the second revolution of online teaching.

> *What is your role in the practice of open education in your university?*

I promote OER by teaching it. I supervise training sessions in OER skills and the tools that are used for it. Not only for the instructors, although I am more focusing on the instructors than the students, but now I am thinking of shifting the focus on the students.

Have you had any communication or exchange of practice with facilitators from other countries?

In Jordan, there was, because there is the GJU. They have been working with us closely in the beginning, but then we went to our separate ways and tried to conduct each an individual project. In the beginning, we had multiple meetings together. I think that was a fruitful corporation between two universities and it would also benefit us to start looking more in the future. To say that we worked together for some time in OER, why don't we work alternatively and have more collaboration. Personally, I've had a very good relationship with Marconi University and with Coventry University, which is a partner. I am leaving for two days in April to attend the OER 2018 conference and I was invited by our partners from Coventry University. The collaboration began to happen by attending conferences, establishing common-interest consortiums, publishing papers, etc.

It seems to me that there is more communication with the European partners, and less with the middle east partners? Is that right?

I would say in the case of the OpenMed project, that is our case. Within Jordan it was limited, it was more between Jordan and European universities.

Why do you think there was less collaboration between universities in the middle east?

I think because Jordanian universities by default are obliged to work together at least in 5 programmes every year. We can have this feeling that it is already there. Let's focus more on the internationalisation of our work.

Would you say it is for academic purposes?

That is correct. We can say in terms of research, people exchange, maybe students exchange in the future, you never know. Since we are taking OER right now, and OER can be conducted especially between universities. You do not have to conduct it in a certain place. It is in the server, you just need the internet-based communication. It gives you this whole vista of communication and partnerships that can open for universities, even if they do not exist in the same country.

Did you feel any cultural barriers with the facilitators from the different countries?

It is funny. Because I felt the barriers between the eastern Arabs and western Arabs, that`s what we call each other. Jordanians and Europeans cope really easily. I don't know if it's the mindset, or the type of didactical thinking. We have a lot of commonalities, especially in the region around the Mediterranean Sea. There are some barriers that I was surprised to experience by our Arabian colleagues.

Would it possible to give me an example?

One simple example, the translation of education. It is different from us and them. OpenMed asked us to name a room in each faculty building to put the equipment in them, like an open education room. Room for open resources. When we translated to Arabic, we translated to "Ta'llim", that's what we call it. In Morocco, it is "Tarbija",

which is more like raising a child. It caused almost 45 minutes of discussion that day. We could have saved those 45 minutes to discuss about something else. It was really funny, we started laughing that day. At the end, we agreed that it is a small thing, do it the way you want, as long as it is in your university.

That´s an excellent example of intercultural differences.

There's another example. In the east universities, they mostly use English for instruction, but specifically, for western Arabian universities they prefer to use French.

Have you had any communication or exchange of practice with facilitators from other countries?

We are working closely together as facilitators by email.

Do you have an email group?

Yes, we have an email group. We have also a guide, a facilitator from Cairo university. He is administrating the whole thing amongst us; to tell us how it is going on, etc.

Is the group very active?

It was active, not very active, but we used to get updates from him every month. At the peak rate of the course, we used to have about two emails per week about updates, reminders that you have to follow up with your learning circle and tell us how it is going, etc.

Let`s say, we are going to expand and implement the OpenMed project to a wider scale, what competencies should we look for when recruiting our future facilitators?

They have to believe in OER as a movement. They should have the skills of teaching online. Also, time ability and commitment to be online at least five times a week. One of these days must be during the week. Most of them go online in the weekend when they finish their work. To provide constant feedback, give update on your students, follow up with those who are sleeping or are away. Be persistent. Encourage students to work together. And also, to have a creative education on methods. Maybe trying to include simulation or games in your course, make it more fun, more entertaining. Teaching education with creativity and entertainment is really a joyful experience.

Apart from what you mentioned, is there any specific skills which you consider very important for the role of the facilitator, specifically for Jordan.

Patience, patience, patience. I would treat students, teachers and who is taking the OER as customers. And if you ask any marketer in the world, they would say that one of the most difficult customers in the world are Jordanians. We are not really patient. We need things quick and finish it quickly.

How can we improve collaboration and communication between facilitators in different countries?

I think OpenMed did a really great job by conducting meetings every now and then. For example, we have one last meeting in Agadir. Before that, we were in Alexandria. Every now and then, we meet face-to-face, that does not mean that there is always resources and funding to do that. Therefore, it is good to have continuous webinars, google hangout, which we did by the way. But some of them were based on demand. E.g. if there is something we all need to sit down and talk about, the project admin would send an email that we need to meet up and we would. We provide our opinions and discuss certain topics. There was a demand for online sessions. I can give you an example as a barrier. The difference in time between the countries. We had one time when Coventry invited us for a webinar meeting and they all agreed it was 9pm, but we were in three different time zones. Then the webinar admin said that maybe this is something we can learn about for the next time. Time differences can be a barrier at some point.

You are saying that face-to-face meetings really improved your communication?

Exactly. Most of the important decisions we took were when we had the face-to-face meetings.

Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects? Or even negative?

I learnt how to manage such projects and it opened the door for me, since it the first European funded projects. To see how EU works, Erasmus+ and all these programmes. The support I got from the OpenMed members and UNIR specifically. There is no question that goes unanswered. They were always there to help us, to guide us and to provide any necessary information.

If you were to manage another learning group from scratch, what would you do differently?

I would not. I think it went really well. Perhaps, I would raise the numbers of the learning circle. Maybe in the next round, I would be able to handle 20.

Thank you for your time.

2) Interview with Open Education Expert #2

University	Cairo University
Country	Egypt
Date	20/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	41 mins

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

Could you please tell me how you organized your learning groups since the beginning of the project?

We are nine team members. We are four professors and three administrations and two are from outside the university. We also chose from different faculties, two from the faculty of engineering and one from information technology faculty and one from commerce. These are all from Cairo University. We have one from Helwan University and the other one from Minia University. We have three admins in our group, one from open education from Cairo University and two are working at the administration. We saw that administration with knowledge of ICT could help in creating OER in the future.

What were the major successes and challenges in coordinating your group?

First, to get people together, involved and engage and motivated in this area of open education. The open education centre in our university was a different concept, more about eLearning. Increasing the awareness is an achievement. We need to work on this area more. Challenge is mainly time. These people are very busy. Despite the high motivation, it was really a challenge for me. If I have the privilege to change something in the future, it would be to lease them from some of their duties to have more time and focus on the activities in open education. Now they work at home after hours, maybe in the weekend to catch up.

Were there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?

Communication skill needs to be really high in our country. Some professors if you talk to them, they would not be cooperative. How to communicate with them is a key. The communication of how to address them, to get them involved in open education activities is one thing we need to think about. Any facilitators working on this, he would need to see how to communicate with these people to come to this activity and share and have their material as OER. Some people say this is my own stuff, my own materials. They do not see the benefit of OER. We also need to be in contact with the policy maker, at least in the Cairo University, to be able to make a change. Without getting to a policy maker, it would be an individual activity initiative and will not reach everybody.

In relation to what you said about the professors, does that vary with age?

I think for older professions to be involved, it is more difficult than younger. The younger professors have already ICT knowledge and skills. An older professor might not have the skills in ICT. This would be a barrier to come to open education.

And you said, that there is a way of how you should communicate with them? Is that related to hierarchy?

This could be one of the issue. And another thing, they are very busy. We need to see how to fit this open education activity in their activities. The ranking is one thing. To avoid misunderstanding.

In your local circle, where there any major concerns in your learning groups, in terms of use and sharing of educational resources?

They are very comfortable. We have one concern. We do not have a clear policy at the Cairo University of how to use OER in their classes. They use it in their classes, but how this fits in the university policy, this area is still not 100% clear. They still see it as an individual initiative in their courses. They do not see the movement as part of the university organisation. They are comfortable working with OER material.

What is the main language in your university?

The faculty of engineering is English and in other faculties, it is Arabic.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

Can you tell me a little bit about the role of OER in your university? How is your university promoting OER?

My role for OER is mainly the technical part of OER, how to host OER, how to create OER, how can I help others to create OER, how to have OER and the changes to fit in their curriculum. The main role is technical, for creating and maintaining OER. The other role is as a professor to change my material in OER in my classes. This is also part of OpenMed project to get some equipment for a room for OER, so we can have a base for this equipment.

How are you seen by the other professors in the engineering faculty? As someone progressive, are they curious?

Yes, I believe so. At the Cairo University we have a grant for the professor who wants to create a MOOC or changing the classes to be open. We are trying to choose the course that are more common for more than one faculty. It is not big money, but it is enough to make this happen. My issue is how to maintain the course, after the course finishes. How to update and modify. If I have a course already created in the OER concept, after one year, definitely I need to update, the evaluation. Creating a course is not the end of the process, it should be a continuous process.

And also, we need to think in Egypt in general to maintain our effort in open education. Sustainability is related to this. Having more than one course in several branches and field.

In your university, is there any policy in terms of student taking these open education courses? Are the students allowed to take open education courses?

No. This policy we do not have yet.

Is it up to the lecturer's will to change their module?

Yes.

And the students are they willing or are they reluctant?

In the faculty of engineering, the students are very interested and motivated to have OER courses. For instance, my course is not 100% open. What I can say about my course, I still have to be on campus and students have to come to campus for the lectures and the evaluation has be in the lab. All my material and assignments and some of the communication with the students and TA is done online. I would like to have it 100% open, but we have some limitations with the policy and the regulation of exams. I cannot make an online evaluation. It has to be on campus and paper exams until now.

Also, I encourage them to be part of the international forums in my course. I am using an open source code for their projects, e.g. for computer graphics. They can learn online. All this counts for their education but does not count for their degree for the time being.

When you say your courses are 100% open, can they be accessed from outside the university or just from your students?

No, they are limited just for my university.

How are OER adapted to your local needs? For instance, if there is a MOOC, is there a need to adapt it for Egypt?

This is an individual effort. Some of the professors see that these courses fit in their curriculum. This is not a policy. But the grades of the students cannot be based on the international courses.

So, the professors would need to adapt the evaluation?

Yes. The international courses are a source of additional material for the course, but not as a course on its own.

Have you observed any barriers, which hinders the participation and learning experience in your learning groups? (technological, digital competencies, attitude, and cultural characteristics)?

Time constraint and effort. Even a small compensation would be nice. Some of them ask, if there is any compensation.

A major criticism of OER is the lack of relevance for one's own curriculum. In many cases, the matching is an extremely demanding task. Did you get any comments from your learning groups about this issue?

This is understanding. I cannot find a course that fit my curriculum 100%. Modifying and adapting OER is part of it. Time is the problem. So that we are creating a team. But this is based on individual efforts. In the faculty of engineering, we have the dean who is interested and he has created two labs for open education with the equipment we get from OpenMed. We have almost a team here. But we need to increase awareness among the faculty members to use the facilities to create OER.

> *Does your university have international students and do you students generally travel to study part of their degrees in other universities?*

We have both. We have students from outside Egypt. They are actually increasing every year.

> *Where do they normally come from?*

Most of them come from Africa or Arab countries. Some of them non-Arabic speaking from Africa. This is one of the issues we need to deal with.

Most of the people hired as TA travel outside Egypt to get their PhDs and come back to the university. We have both directions, coming in and going out.

> *And the students in the Cairo University, where do they want to study?*

Mainly in Europe or US.

> *OER could be a way of internationalising those students who cannot travel. Getting this internationalisation aspect in the content provide a good addition to any degree. What do you think?*

As a young member of the faculty, I see that the students are taking these international courses and participate in all kind of seminars, webinars. But still, to get their official degree in Egypt or outside, they need to physically travel. Online degree is not accepted in Egypt, especially for Masters and/or PhD.

> *The students who do these online courses on a voluntary basis, do you observe that their learning has improved.*

Yes, as a supervisor for my Masters and PhD, it really opens up their ideas and they benefit from these courses a lot. I use this to encourage other students to do the same.

> *Any examples of how they improve their learning?*

For undergrads, for computer graphics we are using an open source utility. These materials are in an international forum, they can get the skills from the participants and share and get their knowledge in this forum. And this forum, they have an open badge to display their work. This is encouraging for them to participate. They are learning something and to see how their skills level out internationally. These courses give them an idea on how to measure their skills on an international level and not just on a local base.

Section 3: The role of the facilitator

Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?

The dean approached me to join this project about a year ago. Before I worked in the US using open education resources in the University of Phoenix. They probably chose me because I can help in this area in the ICT because of my expertise as a professor in the faculty of engineering.

Did you also study abroad?

I did my PhD in Germany and then I came back to Egypt. Then I did a postdoc in US and then I worked there for a while and then I came back to Egypt.

How would you describe the communication or exchange of practice with facilitators from other countries? Did you feel any cultural barriers?

Cultural barriers, no. For example, I am the super facilitator for this project, to communicate with the other facilitators. One time in the middle of the course, I called for an online skype meeting. The response was not really good. Just one attended and one said that he could not make it. When I ask for a status, the report comes late. As a super facilitator the communication was not so good. I do not see active response. But the communication between the facilitators, I have no problem. When I asked for a report, maybe they are not interested to provide a report.

How could this be improved?

I communicated with the project manager from the project. We talked about it and we met in Alexandria and we talked about different ways to approach the facilitators. I would send an email as reminder and then one of the project partners would send another email. So, it seems that they would take the request more serious if it comes from the OpenMed team. It looks like it improved.

Do you reckon, when there is intervention from the team this enhances the communication?

Yes.

Within your own country, are there any specific skills which you consider very important for the role of the facilitator, which perhaps might not be so important in other countries?

The communication skill is essential to be successful. If they can support knowledge with ICT, if they are familiar with the courses they can support more their learning circle. It would be great if the facilitators can already go through the steps just to be aware of what needs to be done, if they have enough time. They also need to be self-motivated to motivate others.

For the context of Egypt, are there any specific skills the facilitators need to have?

He should be aware of open education initiatives and activities happening now in Egypt and if we can help him to be in contact with the policy making in the university and in the ministry of higher education.

How can we improve collaboration between different countries?

We can choose one or two courses which are common between two or three countries and creating one team between these countries who can contribute for this course. This would be an initiative for cooperation. To set a goal to have one open education course in these countries and with two participants in each country to make this happen.

We can also share seminars like what happened in Morocco. For me, unfortunately one of them was in French so I could not attend. This kind of invitation to come together in one seminar or webinar to share knowledge, given we all already know each other, it would be easier to communicate in the future.

Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects? Or even negative?

The international cooperation is a key. Exchanging experiences from the different countries and getting the experience from the European countries. Getting to know the different concepts and definitions of open education from the European countries. It is quite different from what we have in Egypt until now. In Egypt, students still need to come physically to university for their exams, so it is more like eLearning, it is not open.

If you were to manage another learning group from scratch, what would you do differently?

I would try to get the skills we talked about before and I would try to get my learners more time to work on this and to get more support. Relieving the learners from some of their duties. I would also encourage to have more meetings, more seminars in this area. There are too many activities during the year, at an internationally level. I would encourage them to attend to these activities. Like last year, we have one open education international gathering at the American University in Cairo. It was really nice to meet other people working in this area. It was the first time that I had met them. They are also interested to know that at Cairo University there are some initiatives and professors working in this field. And perhaps, a compensation for this activity would be nice.

Would the compensation be financial or time related?

Any of them would be good.

Thank you for your time.

3) Interview with Open Education Expert #3

University	Notre Dame Univeristy-Louaize
Country	Lebanon
Date	26/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	53 mins

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

How did your learning circle originate?

My colleague, who is also a facilitator, we both attended the event in Italy and this is where the learning circles were introduced to us and when we came back to Beirut, we formed this group of colleagues and faculty members to work on this online course.

And how did organise your learning groups since the beginning of the project?

We have been doing a lot of work with OER at the university. I championed this OER project since 2014. For this group, we picked up people who already had started transforming their courses to OER instead of using the traditional text books. We have people coming from the English department, technology department and design department. And one of those, he is a blackboard administrator at the university. Blackboard is like Moodle. The guy is also doing his PhD in digital technology in the classroom. Then we have two ladies from the IT department. One of them is an instructional designer and the other one has a Masters in Computer Science, she teaches computer science courses and she is also my personal assistant. The other group is coming mainly from the English department, because they are working mainly on courses like public speaking. Instead of using a book, they are using open resources. And then we have one person from the mathematics department.

What were the major successes in coordinating your group?

It was not difficult for myself and my colleague because we have been doing a lot of work with OER. The people we contacted for the learning group, they have attended so many workshops with me. Before joining the OpenMed, I have been doing a lot of training, workshops, awareness campaign and capacity building for the whole of university. We were very successful with the group. We formed the group while we were in Torino, virtually. One of the professors in the English department, she didn't have the time to join the group. Just one person from eight people in the group. In Lebanon, everyone knows each other. Our university is a small university. When we called for a face-to-face meeting it was easy. We did a couple of face-to-face meetings to explain to them, to get their feedback, to see what type of problems they are facing, etc. Over all, I would say it ran very smooth.

And did you encounter any challenges?

Everybody is busy. They are teaching courses, they have other duties. The challenge was to keep the learning circle on track. The face-to-face meeting helped in solving

such a problem and knowing the deadlines and also discussing challenges and difficulties. We were both, myself and the other facilitator to answer questions and keep people on track.

> *Time has been mentioned as a challenge by most people. Given your expertise, how could time be faced as a problem?*

Time is a major challenge for most people. I believe there should be a kind of remuneration or incentive. E.g. if you take a faculty member who is using a text book, the resources and the presentation are there ready. When it comes OER, trying to find quality resources, evaluating the resources, then mapping the different resources. This is very time consuming. You have to have passion. You have to believe why you are doing this and how important it is for your students and to yourself as a professor. It is not easy, but the more you move on, there is an international community working with open education that they are ready to help you, to show you resources. But still time is a crucial thing for faculty member.

> *You mentioned that when you know the benefits for students in using OER, you have more incentive in using OER. In your view, what are the major benefits for the students when you use OER?*

There are so many benefits. The cost is one important thing. In Lebanon, and in other places, a major problem is that besides paying the tuition fees, because our university is private, they have to buy the traditional text books for each course. We are talking minimum about 200 – 300$ per semester. Imagine replacing those text books with OER. Another point, sometimes professors face problems with the publisher, because the book is not available due to shipping delays, for instance. Sometimes students in the first week, they do not have the book. At least, if a faculty member is transforming the course to OER, from day one they have their book and resources ready. Another problem is the edition number. Sometimes the professor asks for the tenth edition, but the students would have bought a previous edition because the latest edition had not arrived yet. With OER, your material is updated, you can update on the go wherever you are teaching. Another benefit, if a course is well designed with OER and the faculty member is knowledgeable about finding OER, he can mix and remix different types of resources, he can add video, text files to whatever platform he is using. Another advantage is that with OER, the material is there even when the student graduate. E.g. if you take the traditional publisher, because of this open movement worldwide, they had to change their business model. There is the hard copy of the book, but there is also, what we call the *ecourses*, where the students for a quote can access the book online for a limited time. After that limited time, students do not have access to the resources anymore.

In the learning circle, some of the professors are designing their courses about public speaking and here they are helping students to create their speeches and to put them under creative commons licenses, so in the next semesters students can learn from other students.

> *Were there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?*

First of all, you have to go through stages when you introduce open education to an institution. The most basic step is training and awareness. Anyone trying to champion OER or introducing OE in his/her institution, they have to have passion about OER. They have to understand and locate champions in the institution. You have some faculty members who would prefer that the students simply buy the text book. I do not have time to look for resources. Other types, if they believe in the benefits in OER for both themselves and for the students, then they will follow you. This is what I am trying to do at the university. This is why now I have so many champions working with me in this area.

And do you see any specific needs for Lebanon?

At my university, we use the English language it is not same as Egypt or in Palestine, where Arabic is the main language of teaching. There people will have much harder time to find the resources, localise and translate to the Arabic language. Also, the cultural issues are very important. They have to careful with materials they bring because of cultural issues. We do not have these issues at my university, because it a Lebanese University adopting the American system. But it can be an issue in Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordon and Morocco.

In your university, all the lectures are conducted in English?

Right.

Can you give me an example of a cultural issue related to OER?

Sometimes it depends on the material used. They may be based in an American context. The faculty member may have to be careful when using it because it might cause some tension. It depends on the course and the material. If they want to use a picture or a video, they have to be careful with the cultural issues.

In your local circle, where there any major concerns in your learning groups, in terms of use and sharing of educational resources?

Not really. We see each other all the time. In Lebanon, the face-to-face meetings are very important. Any professor who have a problem, they would just drop by at my office or at some other colleague, it is easy for us. We did not face any major issues, except the time. You cannot put too much pressure on people to finish their work or their projects, because they will say they are trying their best along with all the teaching tasks and their private time with their families, etc. This is the issue of finding the right time to do work.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

You already told me a little bit about your role of OER in your own university. Can you know tell about how is your university promoting OER?

When I started with OE in 2014, I was involved with a big project with the state department, for which I visited US, as part of the *Openbook* project. ALECSO

(The *Arab League* Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization), the educational right arm of the Arab league, they wanted to introduce the concept of openness and OER and to transfer this to the MENA region. I had the opportunity to spend three weeks in the US touring universities, big institutions and creative commons to learn what is happening in the open education movement. When I came back to Lebanon, I met with the leadership of the university, I gave them a workshop to show them which direction things are moving. Then I got the support of the leadership. At the institution level, the president formed a committee, which we called the OER committee. I wanted to institutionalise this process. I did not want to do this on my own, as one initiative which will eventually die. I wanted to be part of the university strategic plan. Now we have the OER in the strategic plan of the university, which is something very important for the people who are championing OER. You can do it on an individual level or as a hobby, but if you want it to be stable and you want it to move on, you have to do both. You have to get the leadership approval and then you can do your training and awareness campaign. This is what I have been doing for the past four years. This is why there are people in my institution who did not know about OER but now they do know. I have champions around me now.

Why did they choose you? Were you already interested in this area?

They wanted a person from each Arab country. They selected me from Lebanon because of my background. I have a PhD in eLearning and online learning. I am the assistance vice president for information technology. I have been with technology for the past thirty years. There were about 14-15 people from the MENA region.

Is there any policy in your university which officially recognises blended learning?

I have been using blackboard since 2000. We have the culture of blended learning. But our university is face-to-face. We are not moving to a complete online course because at the government level there is no policy yet about online diploma. They are now working on a framework. It is moving and changing.

We have a culture of using the blackboard as a support tool. Faculty members they put their lecture notes, their assignments, their homework. Moreover, they give exams online. But these exams are monitored. Students cannot take the exams from home. They come to the university in a big hall where we have about 200 computers. Once we have the go ahead from the government, we already have the culture built in our institution. A lot of the faculty members know how to use the technology, now some are experimenting with OER. We have piloted a couple of courses which are completely OER. Students do not have to buy the books. The materials are all on the platform. One of the professors in the learning circle, he is preparing his courses for fall on blackboard with all OER resources. The courses are not yet open for the public. However, I do not see any barrier for the future, once we have quality assurance, to open for the public. In MIT and other university, what they are doing is that you can go and access the course, but you do not have access to the professor. And if you need a certificate, you have to pay for it. I think we will get to this stage in the future.

OER could be a way of internationalising those students who cannot travel. Getting this internationalisation aspect in the content provide a good addition to any degree. What do you think?

I often get invited from colleagues to give presentation to graduate students about OER and creative commons. Here I introduce the MOOC concept. If you like to take a course which is not offered from our institution which you can join. I give references to universities worldwide offering courses. Some of our students do this. But I do not have any data concerning this to give you more details.

In terms of your own students, do you see any improvement in their learning when they use OER?

In the English department, we are submitting a survey (this is the second year) to collect data to see how liked this way of offering the course with OER. In brief, we had very positive response from our students and they were happy with the materials, and with the different type of resources, not just the text book. We also have data from faculty members. We will publish soon with my colleague data about students who took a course using OER and students who used traditional textbooks to see what differences we observe.

Do you get international students in your university?

Yes of course, we have students from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. We have people from everywhere.

The students who want to study abroad in your university, where do they normally want to study?

Usually, our students mainly go to the US and some go to Europe, e.g. Germany. Mainly because our university is a Lebanese American university, they tend to do graduate courses in US or Canada.

One more thing I wanted to add is that in our institution, like other universities, we have the students' clubs. Now we have a club which is called the *Creative Commons Society.* This group of students are helping us to tell other students about open education, OER and common licenses. This club also has a faculty advisor who believes in openness and who advises students.

A major criticism of OER is the lack of relevance for one's own curriculum. In many cases, the matching is an extremely demanding task. Did you get any comments from your learning groups about this issue?

I receive such comments. But what I am doing know, because I am knowledgeable is take the time myself to find resources. For the learning group and also for other people. I have done it before the OpenMed and now with OpenMed. People who are working with OpenMed, they worked with me before, so they know how to find the resources. Anything I find, a link, a repository, I send it by email to them.

You mentioned before that you did your PhD about online learning. May I ask you, where did you study?

I studied in the States. I have a bachelors in mathematics, a masters computer engineering and my PhD in UK in Sheffield university.

> *How would you describe the communication you had with other facilitators? Did you feel you could collaborate with the other facilitators?*

Not much. I worked very closely with the other facilitator in my university.

> *And what about with the other facilitators?*

One of them, because he was in charge, he would send an email with a deadline or a reminder. The Arab people are very good when it comes to individual work, but when it comes to group work they collapse.

> *Why you think so?*

I do not know. Myself, whenever I have some knowledge I want to get it out of me. I believe in the power of the community. If I have power and another one has power, if we combine both powers, it will be multiplied powers. In general, Europeans like to share. You see it on Twitter. They show what they are doing, they share what they are doing. This is something which is much needed in the Arab countries. I am not talking only about OpenMed. This is in general. The idea of sharing and collaboration is not yet in the Arabic culture. You go to a conference, but after the conference they disappear. This is too bad. If you talk about OER, a lot of work has to done for localisation because we do not have a lot of resources in the Arabic language. This is an issue.

Let me give you an example. I have created a website which I am managing. It is called OER Lebanon (http://www.oerleb.org/). The main idea was to transfer my knowledge not just to my institute but also to other institutes in Lebanon and also to have a repository of any initiative in any Arab country. On the website, you have international open resources, open textbooks and also there is a section for the MENA region. I sent an email to a lot of colleagues in the Arab countries who I met in conferences asking them to send me any initiatives they have, so I can link it to my website. I received feedback from the international community but rarely, close to zero feedback from the Arabs. People do not collaborate much, it is difficult to collaborate with the Arabs.

> *Given your expertise in this area and your international experience, but also the local knowledge being an Arab yourself, you are an excellent person perhaps to provide some suggestions in how this collaboration could be improved.*

When talking about OER, people have to understand and believe that the more collaboration you do inside your country and with other Arab countries, it will be more beneficial to the whole Arab community. If I am doing a project and I share it with other people, let's say in Palestine, our students and their students would benefit from it. But unfortunately, it is not happening very well.

I work a lot with UNESCO and they ask me frequently for feedback and to give presentations about OER. I always go. E.g., two months ago, I went to Tunis to share my experience with about 70 people from Libya, because the UNESCO brought them to Tunis.

Something I am doing also at the national level, is moving OER for high school students. I believe there are excellent resources. I give workshops free of charge for high school professors. I work with the Centre of Education Research and Development (CERD). This is the right arm of the Ministry of Education when it comes to curriculum for K12. I am trying to train their professors who are in charge of the curriculum to understand this open education movement, that you can find resources. They are now in the process of rewriting the curriculum at the national level. I am not working just at the institute level.

> *Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects?*

The work being done by OpenMed is excellent. The people working in the project are very professional. The website they have created is very well designed. The way they divided the course. What it has done to our learning circle is teach us to work in a very systematic way. It was divided into different types of modules and each module had a different topic in it. I really like the course and it was very beneficial for our team here.

> *Thank you so much for your time. I have skipped some questions because you brought up so many interesting information. You have a lot of expertise in this area and we appreciate the time you shared with us.*

4) Interview with Open Education Expert #4

University	GJU, German Jordanian University
Country	Jordan
Date	14/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	33 mins

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

Could you please tell me how you organized your learning groups since the beginning of the project?

In our group, my colleague is the facilitator and I joined later (starting from Torino week) in a supporting role. After the Torino week, things regarding the project were not clear for a while, but eventually, in two or three months, we managed to get everyone together in one room for a meeting. Before that, everyone was working solo but we felt that little is being done. The group that went to Torino were from three different universities in Jordan. As a result, we got the team from GJU (German Jordanian University) to start meeting together. As for the others, two reps are from two different universities that are geographically far from where we are. Following up with them was more remote than meeting in person. At least the team in GJU is meeting in person. I would say bi-weekly to monthly.

Are you saying that all the people in the learning circle meet together face-to-face? And the facilitator organizes those meeting?

Yes, we organize the meetings. And in a way, it is a bit like project management since we distribute work and give out tasks, and a responsible person would be assigned to complete something by the next meeting and we would discuss it then. A person would give a summary and then we would all discuss that and answer and work on towards the project submission.

How did your local group originate?

My colleague would know more about that. He is the one who made the selection of the people. I think, he first chose professors who are interested in open education and also, there is an engineer with us who would sort of help us in with technical matters with the eLearning platform that we needed.

Were the people selected because they were already interested in open learning?

Yes. So at least to make sure they would put in the work to complete the certification or the course.

What were the major successes and challenges in coordinating your group?

There were a lot of eye openers for most people about open education. Even for myself, although I was interested in that field from before, a lot of facts were actually not correct, so I learnt about what is the correct way. I also learnt about the different open

licences which gave me a structured understanding of what open education is. Everyone used to think that it was eLearning but it turned out to be something totally different.

In terms of challenges, there are two types: organisational and content. From a content perspective, the question always is how you get people interested in open education. From a cultural perspective, there is a lot of scepticism for open education. People think of education as formal, you go to university and get certificates. From an organisational perspective, the only challenge was for the team members who are from different institutes, who are not my university, one of them has not been able to join, although he has been working on his project work and we have been monitoring it, just because he lives in a city that is further away. It would be at least a one-hour drive if he wants to join us.

Is this person part of your local circle or is he in another university?

He works at a different university. I forgot what the term used. Something like "community"

Through this project, you collaborated with other universities?

Yes, two others. There is also a fourth from Jordan but they have their own learning circle (PSUT.) They are another university that were part of this programme.

Do you communicate with the other facilitators in Jordan?

Between me and my colleague, because we are in the same local circle. We obviously talk a lot and we see each other every day. But with our colleague in the other university, actually the first time we saw him was in Italy, the second time was in Egypt I think he communicates with my colleague every now and then, but it is not regular.

In your local circle, where there any major concerns in your learning groups, in terms of use and sharing of educational resources?

Sometimes, we would get this question, what's the point of all of this. But hopefully, the answer would be clear later. We will see how the result is like. The good part at least is that the university is supporting us, which is something that is going to go beyond the timeline of the project. We are setting up a room where we would be able to record lectures, provide a university platform for students to refer to and open education resources.

Were there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?

Language was one part. At least in the field that we are working, it has to be in English, because you cannot programme in Arabic, for example. But we have not faced that much, because we are sticking to technical content. Technical content in engineering should be in English. In the sense of local needs, there was not much challenge in that.

The people in your learning group are comfortable in English?

Yes. In English it is fine. For our university specifically, what would be an advantage would be German, because none of us speak German. Our students are required to go to Germany, if they can study of course in German that would help them. However, with

English we are all ok. My personal opinion, I do not like to teach technical content in Arabic because it is supposed to be in English, however, there are professors who do a mix, they can explain a concept in Arabic, then they code and write up in English. The learning circle is confident and ok with English.

In your university what is the main language?

> English.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

> *Can you tell me a little bit about the role of OER in your university? How is your university promoting OER?*

It is something that is starting to become important. There were few initiatives that we even mentioned throughout the course. The university collaborated with one of the platforms in Jordan called EDRAAK to start a course. There has been some openness to the idea of open education. Now the university is also supporting in providing the tools and the resources to be able to record classes if you want to make them as open resources. There is support, there is openness now. The university will not support so much, until the government steps in. You can provide all of this, but then for someone who actually want to attend or watch, they can use the supporting material but they need something that they can use for certification or getting a formal, official degree.

> *Are you saying that the government has not yet taken steps towards making this as a formal recognition?*

The only part that I know of from a government perspective is that you are allowed only 20 -25% of your courseware to be open, but other than that, everything has to be the traditional way.

> *Have you observed any barriers, which hinders the participation and learning experience in your learning groups? (technological, digital competencies, attitude, and cultural characteristics)?*

There is not much of that. We have not experienced it. Everyone has an open mind to it. It goes back to the same point, probably the selection of the people was based on the people that were open to the idea.

> *For some universities, OER has provided an opportunity to build and extend the university as a brand, to showcase their world-class offerings and expand their networks to partners and students who might never otherwise have access or have the possibility to travel, they experience this intercultural diversity through a course. How does this relate to your own university?*

In our university, I do not see this much. Probably when you talk to PSUT, they have more initiatives in that regard. They work with, what I think is a European entity called Kiron, sort of a remote certification kind of thing. They are more open to those ideas. From our university, part of the limitation is because we are a state sponsored university.

A major criticism of OER is the lack of relevance for one's own curriculum. In many cases, the matching is an extremely demanding task. Did you get any comments from your learning groups about this issue?

Yes. In the sense of adaptation. When we looked for open resources we want to adapt. Now there were things which were straightforward and easy for us, because we are working and just covering certain topics. There was also a lot of material out there that was beyond the scope that we want to cover. So that was a bit tougher. We just eliminated and we took just the ones that we were going to cover. Things with the content was probably a challenge as well.

And in terms of the format, do you need to adapt specifically for your own university?

Not really. It is probably because of the lack of data of what our students like or prefer, whether it is rather watching a video, or come to a class. What we have been trying to do though is combine for the course that we are creating, slides, plus open resource book, CW and also videos from our sides. We are not sure whether we would be able to complete it in the timeline. Hopefully we will. We are trying to combine multiple formats. I don't know whether later we would be able to collect some data from people that do attend the course to see which part they prefer, whether the parts that we recorded, or the slides that we have provided.

Section 3: The role of the facilitator

Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?

I had a misconception of what it was in the beginning. I thought of it more as transferring things from eLearning or learning management platforms, which I was huge proponent of from whenever I started teaching, like paperless, everything electronic, moving into a more interesting platform, easier to manage and easier to deal with the students. When my colleague asked me if I am interested, I was like sure I would like to enhance the skills I had or even know about more tools. What I discovered later was that I had a different idea of what open education is but at least it was a huge advantage now that I know, based on some of the platforms that we have discovered, even learning management platforms, stuff that I can turn some of the courses that I already had in open education resources easily with the click of a button. I use different licenses and so on. There were a lot of eye openers and that is how I thought it was a huge advantage to me.

And you landed in this project because you were interested in eLearning?

Yes. But of course, it is a world which includes eLearning and other things.

What is your role in the practice of open education in your university? Are you known as being the open education person?

At the university level, in between professors not as much. I personally try to push stuff through my students. If I attract students, and students show interest, you provide a lot

of success stories through students. That is how you can prove to everyone else that it is something to do, that students would like it. At the end of the day, what we are doing is graduating students.

Have you had any communication or exchange of practice with facilitators from other countries?

Unfortunately, the only opportunity was when we were in Egypt last time. I managed to communicate with some others. We got stuck with the Al Najah University in Palestine delegation on the road for three hours because the car broke down, so we managed to talk about this stuff (laughing).

So, you do not normally communicate with the other facilitators through email?

Unfortunately, not. The communication was mostly about broken stuff and fixing the system, more technical.

Let`s say, we are going to expand and implement the OpenMed project to a wider scale, what competencies should we look for when recruiting our future facilitators?

To be honest, that at least they are in education field. But more than anything from a cultural perspective is having an open mind on the topic. Even if they have experience in the field, if they do not have an open mind, more in the traditional type of learning, they are not going to get anything done.

Within your own country, are there any specific skills which you consider very important for the role of the facilitator, which perhaps might not be so important in other countries?

Language is definitely important. Probably having a platform to be able to project, some sort of being involved in an area that enables the person to project the information, whether it is like us in a university, or let's say in an entrepreneurship field, with a big network if you want.

Can you clarify?

Somebody that has access to a certain network, whether in a university like us or someone in an entrepreneurship area.

You mean network of people?

Being able to project it through the network as well.

How can we improve collaboration and communication between facilitators in different countries?

That is a tough question. I would not have a definite answer for that. What I found beneficial was the face-to-face meetings. But even with face-to-face meetings sometimes, somebody even needs to facilitate or enforce people to talk to each other about topics. Unfortunately, everyone tends to stick to their own breed. Even when you have those face-to-face meetings, you need somebody to reinforce them remotely, so that you can actually discuss. When we went to Italy, we found that very beneficial,

when we had a lot of those learning groups, but somebody had to physically separate people from the same country to talk to others.

> *Are you saying that you would need specific workshops or meetings that try to foster intercultural communication?*

Yes. Absolutely. Doing it remotely with schedules and going back to the original problem, the language part, even dialects. We all speak Arabic but we all speak in different dialects would make it harder for people to talk to each other.

> *From you own experience, did this project give you the possibility to learn more about other cultures, what other universities are doing or that you learnt something?*

To a certain extent, not as much as I would have liked to. Interestingly enough, at least, probably we learnt more about the universities that are involved in Europe and new things about those, more than the universities that were specific in the Middle East.

> *And in your opinion, how could that be changed?*

I am not sure. For me, anything I would like to learn more about things that relate to my own field more than other fields, because that what would get my interest to really want to know more about. If it is a field I do not know much about I would not be really interested.

> *In your case, you would be more interested to connect with other universities in the Middle East who are also doing engineering?*

Yes. Absolutely. Now that I remember, there was a side conversation that I had with one of the participants in Torino, he was from a university in Morocco and it was actually about research, technical research, so it was a part of OER topic. That was at least one incident that I remember.

> *You would have liked to have more of these incidences?*

Yes absolutely.

> *Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects? Or even negative?*

In terms of positive experience, I got to watch a Juventus game. Managing to watch a game over there was the nice part. In terms of content, meeting people from other universities there were positive things. Being able to connect with people from the Middle East and even from Europe was a positive experience. Learning about OER, what it really is was probably one of the most beneficial positive experience. The only negative part that I can think of, at least from a logistics perspective, it would be the incident that happened in Egypt (when the car broke). Other than that, most of the experiences were positive.

> *If you were to manage another learning group from scratch, what would you do differently?*

For us, probably timeline was one of the challenging parts. Also, what we expected out of the Torino week was totally different to what we ended up doing, in the sense that, it was a sort of orientation of the modules that you are going to work on. I think even other learning circles, some people thought that were going to actually work on something while we were there. Being more hands-on part. If you do not have much hands-on, you tend to get bored and a bit sleepy. Something that I just thought about would be beneficial is having facilitators managing local circles in different regions, so mixing up the facilitators in local groups. I don't know if that would help with the interaction and the exposure.

Thank you for your time.

5) Interview with Open Education Expert #5

University	Birzeit University
Country	Palestine
Date	27/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	39 mins

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

Could you please tell me how you organized your learning groups since the beginning of the project?

We had previous courses in Birzeit University about developing online courses. We tried to make sure that our learning circle is formed by people who already had experience with eLearning, so as to build on their experience and what they did before in this area. We have 3 professors from Birzeit University working in the circle. One from psychology and two from the faculty of commerce, one from finance and one from commerce.

What were the major successes and key challenges in coordinating your group?

Demanding more than what we had anticipated. There was a gap between the time the learning circle thought they would need and what the actual course required. Some modules were very long, they required a lot of time to read and comprehend and to reflect on them. Another challenge was that two members of the learning circle were assigned coincidently new management posts, besides their academic role, during the time of the project. Another challenge, we had a strike at the university by the staff syndicate and we were out of the offices for some time and this disrupted the whole university calendar. The last challenge was the internet issue with Webinars. The first webinar we missed because we did not realise the time difference. The webinars were organised in the evening, so you work from home and your internet connection is not like the internet connection you have the university, so it was not always easy for them to connect.

Is there a difference in the type of internet connection you get at home and at the university?

Yes. The Palestinians universities they get internet based on an international agreement supporting higher education with WIFI, so we have huge strong connection. From home, it is very limited, there is a quota on how much you can download and upload, etc.

That is very interesting. Internet connection is something we take for granted here in Spain. Is there any major success that you want to share?

One major success from this project is having a community. A community which formulated through the project and works together. We are now in communication with the Vice President (VP) to facilitate this course to other colleagues at the university.

One of our members of the learning circle, she got a management post with the VP Academic developing the capacities of the local stuff, which is a success story. Another success story is what we learnt about licences, how to go open, what is open and what is not. All this is new to us. This is a huge amount of learning for us. It was really insightful for us. The final project, which we are finalising now, is also a success in itself because we are producing open education resources to upload them on the university platform.

Are these resources in English or Arabic?

They are in Arabic. This is the added value, because they are plenty of OER in English. The member from the psychology, he worked on OER in bulimia. This is becoming a big trend in the university. He produced an OER on bulimia, like an awareness video. The second OER is from the other two commerce professors who joined each other. They took a local company, they took their students for a field visit and the student videotaped it and they are now working on open resources for ratio analysis and promotion.

In terms of OER, are there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?

It's all about the access. How do you make it really open? This is a question that we have now. It is something we are talking to Fabio and the team. How to make it open not just to our small community of learners.

Now we have a course that we are adapting to OER about citizenship. Adaptation means translation, to adapt the case studies and topics to localise for the Palestinian needs.

What are the major concerns in your learning groups, in terms of use and sharing of educational resources?

Not really, because they were already open to the idea when we went to the course in Turin.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

Can you tell me a little bit about the role of OER in your university?

I work at the Centre for Continuing Education at Birzeit University. This centre is an outreach centre. My role is to develop and design learning programmes in specific areas based on the needs on target groups. Because we work with practitioners and young professions, they learn differently, they have different needs, so you always need to expand the learning you provide to them. You cannot limit it to a book or one reference. You always have to provide them with more tools and resources to reflect on their own experience in their jobs with the learning they are getting. I always need to look to other available resources.

How is your university promoting OER?

This is a new trend for the university. We have a new initiative. It is a repository where our scholars upload their knowledge production. This is part of promoting OER.

Is there any policy from the university in terms of formal recognition of OER?

Unfortunately, not. It is not because the university does not want that. It is because the policy of the country does not allow this. The ministry of education does not accredit OER degrees. OER is used to support the learning, but not the core of the learning.

For some universities, OER has provided an opportunity to build and extend the university as a brand, to showcase their world-class offerings and expand their networks to partners and students who might never otherwise have access or have the possibility to travel. How does this relate to your own university?

It relates totally to the Palestinian context. In Palestine you have restriction of movement from one city to another. If you are a European professor and want to come and teach at our university, it is very unlikely that you will granted a visa by the Israeli occupation. There is a high need to adapt OER. But it is not yet approved by the Ministry of Education. We have now worked on a five-year strategy at the Birzeit University and it is about being an entrepreneurial university. Part of this is making this paradigm shift in learning and going to openness. But it is not only up to us alone, it has to be accepted by the Ministry of education.

But specifically, for you case, where travel is so limited especially for your students, do you see OER as providing this international experience?

Now we have several universities spread in the West Bank and some universities in the Gaza. These students have never been outside Gaza, outside that one square kilometre area. For them giving this international exposure through OER, is an added value, it is an eye and mind opener, it gives them a sneak peak of what is happening in the international world. It is major need for Palestine, out of all the countries in the world, because I think there is no other country in the world who have restrictions on movement as we do in Palestine.

Do you get foreign students coming to study in Palestine?

It is the same issue. We have a Pass programme, where students come to learn Arabic at Birzeit university. We have a lot of restriction from the Israelis in granting a stay visa for internationals who want to stay long periods in the West bank. They will give them three months visa and they have to go out and get it renewed. The semester is usually minimally four months. The students who are granted this visa is very limited. We can take more, but it is the issue of the visa.

Do your students go to study abroad? Where do they normally want go?

England is high demand. Europe in general and US. Some of them go the Arabic countries, mostly Jordan because it is close and it is a similar culture. In Jordan, there is a big Palestine community. There is always the issue of the visa.

A major criticism of OER is the lack of relevance for one's own curriculum. In many cases, the matching is an extremely demanding task. Did you get any comments from your learning groups about this issue?

Mainly the part on licensing because there is no procedure or guidelines on licensing.

Section 3: The role of the facilitator

Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?

The idea of the Erasmus programme is to organise partnership programmes. Birzeit is one of the distinguished university in the area. I am responsible for the design and the development of new programmes.

I have several diplomas in my section. I am in charge of the design of these diplomas. All my diplomas are e-enabled. The Ministry allows me to have 30% online and 70% face-to-face. This is like a continuous professional education programme.

What is your background education?

Business administration and I have a Master's degree in Development.

Did you study abroad?

No. In Palestine.

Do you communicate with the other facilitators?

Yes, with another open education facilitator from An- Najah University. We are colleagues. She used to work with us.

And with the other countries?

Unfortunately, not. We did not have the chance.

Let`s say, we are going to expand and implement the OpenMed project to a wider scale: What competencies should we look for when recruiting our future facilitators?

They need to have good communication skills, flexibility, listening skills, ability to work with diverse needs of people. Even in my learning circle, even though we come from the same university, the way of thinking is different. To be able to accommodate the diversity of the group. Ability to go with the challenges of the university. It was not easy with the politics.

Why do you think there was not so much communication between the different facilitators?

This is a tough question. I am working on this project and this is one of the 13 projects I have on my desk. It would be difficult to invest more time to communicate with the time limits. Time limitation is one of the issue. When you meet in a course, outside your country, you work and discuss. There is no issue. It is different when we meet, there is no issue of communication or barriers. Once you are back to the office and to the hectic style of life that we are leading here, it becomes a barrier to find time to communicate.

Perhaps the lack of collaboration between the different countries, it is a bit of missed opportunity. How can we improve collaboration between different countries?

This is not the first Erasmus programme I joined. I have joined several ones. The OpenMed is one of the most beneficial and one of the best. I have learnt a lot. I can see tangible and visible benefits. I have learnt a lot from the management style. The project manager is doing a great job. She is really applying transparency, integrity and this is very appreciated. For us, not having the opportunity to travel a lot and also not having many people coming to Palestine is like a life saver. You are like in a deep well and this project pulls you out to the light.

I don't know how we can improve the collaboration. It is a tough question.

Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects?

So many. This is one of the best projects. The project manager and her attitude and her management skills, the diversity in the group. How she managed to build a community, a team of learners in this programme. The contents of OER is totally new for me, we already knew eLearning, but this is taking learning to a new dimension.

Thank you for taking the time to sit with us for the interview.

6) Interview with Open Education Expert #6

University	Alexandria University
Country	Egypt
Date	12/03/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	49 mins

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

Could you please tell me how you organized your learning groups since the beginning of the project?

For the learning circle, we wanted to target the junior and mid-career educators of the university because they might help later on and they would be knowledgeable of ICT. We also focused on including a diversity of faculties. University of Alexandria is a very large university and it is multi-disciplinary. We include people from all the groups, from the medical sector, engineering, fine arts and sculpture, humanities, music, history, tourism, education and literature. By the time of Torino week, we had a meeting with them to prepare about the course, to motivate them and ensure their enthusiasm to continue the course, because it is a long journey. We also try to socialise together. I know all of them before designing the group, but they did not necessarily know each other. For Torino, we decided to all fly on the same flight, to work as a group not as individuals and after going back from Torino, we decide to make the webinars like a social event, just to keep in contact. We have regular meetings. We assigned a WhatsApp group to keep up to the deadlines and the dates of the webinars and for any issues or questions that they need. Not just to ask me as a facilitator or my boss, but also to discuss and share the ideas together.

What were the major successes and key challenges in coordinating your group?

I did not have much knowledge about open education before going to Torino and to Madrid. I enjoyed to have the same ideas from different point of views. We all agree that OER is the future of education, especially for large universities like ours. In particular, for instance in the Faculty of Commerce or the Faculty of Arts. In one academic year, there might be 3000 students. I was convinced before that open education is important like 80%, but after Torino and joining this group, I realised that it is more than 100%.

My background is medicine. It is totally different to the Faculty of Tourism or the Faculty of Arts. We share our experience of different types of classes, different cultures of students. This is a major success.

The second success is keeping the team work over six months. We are working together to establish the centre, because it is not yet established. We still share ideas together.

What do you mean by different cultures of students?

I mean, students in different disciplines and also the concept of student about physical attendance, behaviour in class, etc. For example, the medical students are very enthusiastic to attend physically the class, they are very keen in learning in every point. On the other hand, in humanities they might not be attached as regular students, they do not need to attend physically, so this is a different culture. By the end of the story, all the student, regardless of their discipline need open education. Even medical students who attend regular classes or engineering students. Availability of OER is very efficient. For instance, a virtual hospital, a virtual world, a video about a part of the cadaver. It is important to have the material online and available all the time.

And one of the key challenges in coordinating your group?

We have different age groups and different categories, like we have three assistant lecturers, one assistant professor, that is me, and three young professors. We are different categories. Even though we are all enthusiastic about the course, to keep all of them harmonised was a challenge. And also, because we have different backgrounds and different interests. The harmony of the group, which was very nice, ended up being a success, rather than a challenge.

In terms of the different ranking of the people, can you give me an example to illustrate how it was a challenge?

It was really a challenge. For example, for a vice dean of a faculty to be in the same table with the assistant lecturer was not an easy task. But it ends up by being a success, because we enjoy it. The week in Torino, sometimes being abroad, all in the same circumstances, enjoying not only the classes and the meetings, but also having social and sightseeing in the evenings. It breaks up the barriers. But I was afraid to coordinate this group of ladies with different age groups, different academic background and different ranks. Decision makers and juniors.

Were there any specific local needs you have observed when adapting OER in your country?

We have an initiative since maybe few years ago. We started open education in the late 80s and early 90s. The open education was very different from the concept that we discuss in OpenMed. It was just to exempt students from physical attendance and to give them hands-on material like CD, videotapes and even a hard disk to learn by themselves and then come back once or twice a year, just to be examined. The idea was not bad, but overtime it was realised it should not continue. Few years ago, the Egyptian ministry of higher education started an initiative to adopt the blended learning, partly open education, like the concept of OpenMed to make MOOCS and OERs online and part of it for physical attendance. According to the course, it would be negotiable. It might be full OER in one course and half in another course, according to the objective of the course. In this context, they started the Distant Learning Centre of Egyptian universities. This is central in Cairo. It offers technical support for institutions. E.g. if a am professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the Alexandria University and I want to develop my own MOOC or I have to design a course with my colleagues, I have to refer to administration and the administration back to the Distant Learning Centre in Cairo and we can redesign our MOOC. They will offer anything from redesigning the MOOC

to publishing them online. We have a platform for OER, the Egyptian knowledge bank. Huge platform of open educational resources in Egypt which is accessible to anyone in Egypt.

> *In your learning group, did you get any comments about adapting OER specifically for Egypt?*

Let's say for my learning circle, we targeted from the start the mid and early educators in the university. They are all enthusiastic to use open education and to share their resources online. Still we have a sector of seniors who still have barriers in sharing their material online because of financial causes. They seal their material. If it is available online, it will be a financial disaster for them. Perhaps, because they do not have enough ICT skills and cannot develop their MOOCs. This is a challenge to change the cultural background to make the hard box (hard drive) to open education resources. This is a bigger challenge to change society in Egypt. We still have a large community who still do not believe in OER.

Section2: Cultural adaptation and the organization of the university

> *Can you tell me a little bit about the role of OER in your university? How is your university promoting OER?*

We have an eLearning Centre. It is a centre that offers support to educators to develop or transform the material to be online. We have the Faculty of Medicine shared in a project that is called BeDAfrica, a project coordinated by an Indian institution. It is a network of 15 or more institutions, where they share conferences or lectures or make a webinar. On an individual basis, for instance, I publish some of my material to the students on the university website giving them to share among themselves.

> *Just to clarify from a previous question, when you find an open course for Medicine, for instance, how do you go about adapting for your students?*

First of all, I have to consider whether this is public domain. Before adapting or making any changes to this material, I have to consider the license. I can advise the students to share the link with them. In the Faculty of Medicine, in the new system, students will be asked to make an assignment, like a power point, and they have to look for references. The easiest way is just to look online, instead of going to the library. Usually, I have meetings with them to advise about the platforms they can use and to consider the license.

> *Have you observed any barriers, which hinders the participation and learning experience in your learning groups? (technological, digital competencies, attitude, and cultural characteristics)?*

For my learning group, there is no problem. They are all very enthusiastic. One of their comments is that they enjoy the learning circle a lot. Last week, just before the submission of the last assignment, I thanked all for their participation. I have many comments about how they enjoyed being part of a multidisciplinary group. They do not have any problems. But they might face a problem with their colleagues. Many will open up their education, but still others will remain unconvinced.

Which is the main language of instruction in your university?

In the Faculty of Medicine, it is totally in English. In science and engineering, they have special programmes which are in English. Others are in Arabic, in all sectors of humanities, except for those studying foreign language.

For some universities, OER has provided an opportunity to students who might never otherwise have access or have the possibility to travel. How does this relate to your own university?

Students all over the world, they look forward to having an opportunity to pursue part of their post-graduate study abroad. To be competitive, to be a global graduate, they have to start using OER very early, to have this experience with others and to see how other students are doing in other universities. The new generation of students are very enthusiastic about visiting the websites of universities in Europe or in Japan. Students now like to know how other students study. Usually, I have comments from my students saying for instance, that the course in this university is a little bit different.

You are saying that students look for different courses and they compare courses?

Yes.

Do students in your universities go to study abroad? Where do they normally want go?

It depends. In orthopaedics, they believe Germany is the best. For those studying oncology and cancer research, they like France or US. But of course, Europe and US are the most demanded.

Do you get foreign students coming to study in your university?

Sure. In the Faculty of Medicine, we have an international undergraduate programme. The largest sector is coming from Malaysia. We have an agreement with an organisation there that give a loan to students to study in Egypt. We have a good group from the Arab countries and from Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda. This is for the undergraduate. For the post-graduate level, we have grants for African countries, especially for Kenya. Students coming from African countries can study for free. From the European countries, we have an international mobility programme, through which we accept students. But students from Europe, do not prefer to have a full degree from an Egyptian university. They will do some credit transfer or some research from a week up to six months. We have a student from the University of Granada who three years ago did a PhD in our university in sociology. We have students from all over Europe.

Your university seems to be very international. In terms of readiness to adapt to OER, what in your opinion are the criteria which are important?

First of all, to develop a very strong platform. If the infrastructure is good, it would be convenient for the students to use. If the platform is not so good, the students will give up in using it. We have to train the educators in how to make their own OER and how to

publish them. Also, to adopt a strategy of how to publish OER. E.g. if we ask the teacher or oblige them to publish their lectures online, it would be great. Basically, to formalise the publication of teachers' OER.

<u>Section 3: The role of the facilitator</u>

> *Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?*

I am one of the key persons of the project. The main contact is our professor. He chose me because I am committed to the work, I believe in open education, and I have good communication skills with others. And lastly, I can manage with all of the group, because the seniors are around my age and very close to my rank, and for the juniors, I can manage with them like friends.

> *Did you have any experience in open education before? Where you doing any work in this area?*

On an individual basis, I published some of my presentations as OER for the students.

> *Did you study in Egypt?*

I have all my studies in Egypt. But I have some international research. I am also coordinating the EU projects in my university. Since 2008, I am in the grants office and in the international cooperation projects in the faculty of Medicine. Since 2009, I have been nominated as a focal point for the EU founded projects. And 2013, I have been promoted to be the director of the grants office, including all the international projects in the university and since 2016 until now, I am responsible for the Technology Innovation Commercialisation office and I am the deputy director of the Projects Management Unit and I am responsible for the EU projects, especially the Erasmus+ key action.

But this is the first EU project for me to be inside. Usually, I am watching from outside.

> *Did you have occasions to communicate with the other facilitators in the other countries?*

Yes, we keep communication together through the WhatsApp OpenMed group. The project manager developed a WhatsApp group since we were in Madrid. We keep in touch through the platform UNIR developed through the course. On the other hand, we can contact each other to share experiences or if we want anything. For instance, we ask colleagues about the specs of the devices we might need in the distant learning centre. We have strong ties with facilitators in the Cairo University because we are in the same country. We usually meet in social gatherings, apart from OpenMed.

> *And with the other countries?*

We keep communicating with UNIR, because they offer technical support to us. Our colleague in Coventry has a good knowledge of the coordination of the project. With the project manager, all the time. I really like the way she manages the project because she 24/7 for any support or any query.

And perhaps, less with the other Arab countries?

Still we have. We are in touch.

Let`s say, we are going to expand and implement the OpenMed project to a wider scale, what competencies should we look for when recruiting our future facilitators?

To choose people who believe in open education. For me, I would choose from the learning circle.

But let's say, we are talking about a future scenario?

I have to look for a person who is committed, who has good communication skills with others, good personality. Somebody who is flexible, open minded, he can accept others, he can listen. I should also respect the academic background to be related with the project, if the project is in medicine, I have to choose somebody from medicine.

Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects?

Something I learnt from this project is that we started this project with different levels of knowledge about open education. The European countries may be knowledgeable. they have more experience than us. Still they give a hand to all. We started step-to-step. We started by reviewing the good practices together. Actually, I got benefit from Coventry because we reviewed together the good practices. I got good experience from UNIR in managing the online course and how to adjust the online platform, every now and then. It was my first time to use Sakai. I got an excellent experience from the project manager in coordination of the project. She is very committed. She is very organised. She coordinated the project very well. It was also a good experience for me to develop a module about open education.

Thank you so much for your time and for your insightful information about the project.

7) Interview with Open Education Expert #7

University	An-Najah National University
Country	Palestine
Date	26/02/2018
Interviewer	Romina Cachia (University of Seville)
Duration	First part (34 mins)
	Second part (18 mins)

Section 1: Management of the learning circle:

The first two sections of this interview could not be transcribed due to a technical fault with the recording of the interview. A short summary of what was discussed is presented below.

Expert #7 is very active in her university in open education. She was working with another university when she decided to do an online diploma, 80% of which was carried online. This course changed her attitude about open education and she decided to become more active. She moved to her current university, where she works now as the Director of the eLearning Centre. The professor organised her local circle by choosing people who were interested in open education. She formed a learning circle of 10 people, organised face-to-face meetings with them and asked for a monthly report from the learners. Her learning group participated very well in the limited time they have and have now launched a new MOOC: "Genetic & Society", following the previous one "Discover Palestine".

When asked about challenges in her learning circles, the professor spoke about time. Everyone has a limited time and so she decided to support her learning circle by taking away some of their tasks, in order to make people feel that this project on open education is important. She also spoke about the lack of Arabic content in OER and she feels that this is something she wants to work on. One example is the online course for the general public called the "Safer Online". This is an initiative to help society to be safe online. It was a big task for the team to choose quality material according to best practises and to create the necessary content for the online course. In terms of international students, the professor spoke about the political challenges faced in Palestine in getting visas for foreign students. There are various students who come to study Arabic in An-Najah National University but most students are given 3 months visas, so they are not even allowed to finish an entire semester. In terms of adapting OER in Palestine, she said that some may not be suitable because they are embedded in another culture, e.g. American culture.

The second part of the interview is transcribed below.

Section 3: The role of the facilitator

> *Can you tell me a little bit about your personal experience in open education and your trajectory until the opened project?*

I started my journey with open education years ago when I was working as a director for the Al-Quds open university in Palestine. I worked there for six years. I got used and learnt about the philosophy of open education. Despite that I do not agree in how it is delivered in Al-Quds, but I know the philosophy. Then I got an online diploma from Sloan consortium from USA and Penn State university for leadership in online higher education institution. Mostly it is 80% online for one year to get this diploma in transferring your institution in online philosophy. Then I worked in An-Najah as the director of the eLearning Centre and I started to work on transferring the university to adapt to open education. I got more experience and learnt more than I expected from the project. It changed my perspective to view it as a way or a tool for exchanging information. Through this project, I expanded my knowledge of open education. There was a lot of differences in the concepts of each partner around the Mediterranean area. Exchanging experience was very beneficial and it make me look at it a different way.

How would you describe the communication you had with other facilitators?

It is important that we exchange experience. Although we are working in different tasks, we are working in the same direction.

In your opinion, when is a university ready to apply open education?

What we achieved last year is a lot of things regarding open education. We now have an online repository that all researchers need to put their scholar work on it and we put all the university production, like thesis. The university is encouraging all scholars and faculties member to put everything on the repository. But I think what is missing until now, is writing it down as part of the policy. We need to work on that.

Let`s say, we are going to expand and implement the OpenMed project to a wider scale: what competencies should we look for when recruiting our future facilitators?

As from the start, it was to involve other universities, with our universities. But what we did was only for our university. We should expand it to other universities. The facilitator must be aware of the philosophy behind open education. Some might think that the facilitator should not be an expert, but I think he should be an expert. He should know more than the learners, to be able to facilitate efficiently, otherwise he will be stuck with some issues that will delay the delivery. If he is not an expert, it will be a challenging learning experience for him, which is good, but because of the challenge of time it is easier if he is an expert. He must know Arabic and English very well. The most important of all are communication skills and personal *power* (influence). He can influence others. The others accept him. The project is a bottom-up approach and not an up-down approach. Not to force them, but to convince them, to attract them, to show them the benefits of being involved and to encourage them to be committed. Commitment is a big challenge, especially with online courses and MOOCs. People start very enthusiastic, but day by day, they lose their enthusiasm and many of them drop out.

You mentioned language, in your university is teaching conducted in Arabic or English?

Both. It depends on which course you are in. In some faculties like engineering, business and medicine, it is in English. But in humanities, like education, religion, Islamic studies and Law are Arabic.

> *You mentioned a lot of skills that the facilitators should have, are there any competencies specific for Palestine which a facilitator should have?*

Commitment.

> *How can we improve collaboration between the different countries, that is, between the different partners that are participating in the project?*

The face-to-face meetings were very important to improve the collaboration. However, it is still not to the standard that we look for. We should have more collaboration in research, in projects and we should make more visits. Perhaps, virtual visits, not only face-to-face because it is very costly.

> *Can you share a positive experience you have learnt from this project, which you could transfer to other projects?*

Personally, I learnt a lot. The new concepts which I did not know about, about the types of licences and adopting OER. In terms of skills, I learnt how to reflect about my own experience. I get more confident on what I am doing as a university in producing more OER. I am very proud of the MOOC 'Discover Palestine' because it was chosen as a case study and it was presented in several occasions. I am confident that we did a good job and so we are confident to produce more content. We have a group of people that did research together, we publish a paper and now we are sending a paper in a book and now we are working now on this research. By working with international researchers, I get the skills to publish in international journals, rather than local. I learnt a lot from our colleague in Coventry University specifically in research. It was a wonderful experience for me. Some of my colleagues had never left Palestine. It was an opportunity for them to travel, not only for pleasure but also for culture orientation, which is very important for them, to meet people from different countries, it is always a pleasure. I can write a chapter in a book about how this project has improved our practices and concepts on open education.

Thank you so much for your time and input. We really appreciate your time.