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Supporting Latin American researchers in Open Education through the Collega mentoring program

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Abstract

While Global OER Graduate Network's (GO-GN) currently supports 116 PhD candidates and alumni registered at universities in 26 countries, of these members, only 30% conduct their research in the Global South. The concern is there that, even with all the efforts put into place to be open and a willingness to be diverse, the Global South is still under-represented within this community, which means that GO-GN is not reaching those who could potentially benefit the most from being part of the network. Although equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) has been driving the GO-GN agenda since its foundation in 2013, it was only in 2018 when its first project directly related to EDI was developed.

The first [phase of GO-GN DEI project](#) focused on EDI practices in Open Education in Africa. Findings of this first stage informed the initial GO-GN guidelines for EDI. These findings have also informed phase 2 of the project, which investigated EDI in Open Education in Latin America. Most of phase 2 was conducted in 2020, during the global pandemic, which directly affected the plans of data collection and project dissemination. Even so, 12 online interviews with key OE experts across Latin America were conducted, including from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Uruguay.

Some of the key findings of phase 2 revealed that there is a growing amount of research and work being undertaken in Open Education in Latin America. However, dissemination seems to be done mostly in their local language (Spanish and/or Portuguese), which inhibits this knowledge to reach the Global North and other experts in the field. On the other hand, most research in OE is disseminate in English, which in turn only reaches a minority of researchers in Latin America who have English proficiency. This indicate that the lack of language diversity of research outputs can be a barrier to expand the Open Education movement in and beyond Latin America. Findings also revealed that participants were keen to build networks and foster collaboration with the Global North and amongst other Latin American countries. Participants have also indicated that they would welcome support and encouragement to publish in English in order for their work to gain more visibility across the world (Bossu & Vladimirschi, 2020).

These and other findings, project participants suggested the following recommendations so that some of the issues could be addressed. These recommendations include:

- raise awareness of the Global North with regards to Latin American OE initiatives in order to be more included in the global scenario;
- help Latin American scholars in OE to produce papers of high quality in English;
- receive assistance in the proofreading of papers or articles related to OE;
- having GO-GN through its expertise to assist Latin American countries in building more effective communities of practice and/or research;
- perhaps, these communities of practices would also help with the translations and proof-reading to help to address the language barrier issue;
- offering of virtual spaces (i.e., discussion forums), in addition to face-to-face conferences that may not be accessible to all, as a means for networking and collaboration on the GO-GN site;
- providing a mentoring/supervisor program for new members that are non-English speakers; and

- having GO-GN be more present in Latin American conferences.

As can be seen by the findings and recommendations above, there seems to be the need to create opportunities for Latin American scholars in OE to disseminate their work and engage with communities more broadly, especially in the Global North. To address this need and assist the fulfilment of its mission, GO-GN has embarked in a quest to push the EDI agenda by implementing several of the recommendations above through the Collega Mentoring Program. This program involves the participation of mentors and mentee, where mentors have English proficiency but also speaks either Spanish and Portuguese, and mentees would be either a Spanish or Portuguese speaker needing support to disseminate a piece of work in English. In this presentation, we will provide an update on the progress of the Collega program, including participants engagement and work being developed by the partnership between mentors and mentees. This is expected to build capacity for GO-GN as well as increase the diversity of work being disseminated through the network.

Conference attendees will be asked to engage and provide their suggestions and views on the program. We hope that this project assists better representation from the Global South in GO-GN, and that we have the strategy and tools in place to fulfil our aims in an intercultural, connected and open world.

References

DEI phase 1 – Blog post <http://go-gn.net/research/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-project/>

Bossu, C. & Vladimirsch, V. (Nov 16-20). Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Latin America in the Context of an Open Education Initiative, presented at the Open Education Global 2020.

<https://connect.oeglobal.org/t/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-latin-america-in-the-context-of-an-open-education-initiative/387>