

Open Educational Resource Policy Case Studies

The Seychelles

January 2024



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Date of publication: 26 January 2024

Published by: Neil Butcher & Associates

Acknowledgements:

We would like to express our gratitude to Sanjaya Mishra (Commonwealth of Learning), John Lesperance (Ministry of Education, Seychelles), and Andrew Moore (NBA) for sharing their valuable experiences that greatly contributed to the development of this case study.

Unless otherwise stated, the views expressed in this case study are our own and do not necessarily reflect the positions of those acknowledged above.

Background

National Open Educational Resource (OER) policies – or other national policies that contain OER provisions – are an increasingly popular tool being used to mainstream the use of OER. However, recent research suggests¹ a dearth of information on the implementation of such policies, and knowledge gaps in the successes and challenges associated with doing so. Documenting such processes across different country contexts is key to bridging the knowledge gap between OER policy conceptualisation and implementation. This case study outlines the OER policy development process for the Seychelles' Information Communications Technology (ICT) in Education and Training Policy (2014-2019) and the subsequent ICT in Education and Training Policy (2022-2027). Both projects were initiated and supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).²

The Republic of the Seychelles (*République des Seychelles*) is an archipelago of 150 islands in the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar. The population is approximately 99,258³ and the literacy rate is 96%.⁴ The official languages are French, English, and Seychellois Creole. In 1976, the Seychelles gained independence from British rule.⁵

Given the British influence, the education system in the Seychelles is modelled after the British system and is divided into three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary education is compulsory and is provided to all children between the ages of six and eleven free of charge. Secondary education is also free and lasts for five years. It is divided into two cycles, with the first cycle of four years leading to the International General Certificate of Education (IGCE) Ordinary Level, and the second cycle of two years leading to the IGCE Advanced Level (A Level). Tertiary education is provided by Professional Centres and the University of Seychelles. The Professional Centres offer technical and vocational courses while the University of Seychelles offers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes.

The country's literacy rate sits at over 95%⁶ and the government places high priority on education. As a result, the country has achieved significant progress in providing universal access to education. However, there are areas for improvement within the education system. For example, approximately 8% of school-age children were out of school, and 112 secondary students⁷ dropped out of the school system in 2019, most of whom were in secondary education. Secondary education performance does not yet match the standard set by government.⁸ Compounding these challenges are infrastructure and technology shortages, such as a lack of ICT in schools, together with a need to train educators to deploy these effectively. These challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where educators and learners were thrust into online teaching.⁹

¹ See <https://www.nba.co.za/article/researching-open-educational-resource-oer-policies>

² Hosted by the Government of Canada with headquarters in Burnaby, British Columbia, COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning. See <https://www.col.org>

³ World Bank. (2021). Population – Seychelles. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/SC>

⁴ Macrotrends. (2020). Seychelles Literacy Rate 1987-2023. Retrieved from <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/SYC/seychelles/literacy-rate>

⁵ AACRAO Edge. (nd). Seychelles. Retrieved from <https://www.aacrao.org/edge/country/seychelles>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/literacy/>

⁷ This figure includes 40 students left the system to join private schools, move overseas etc.

⁸ Commonwealth of Learning. (2021). Towards a new model of schooling in Seychelles. Retrieved from <https://oasis.col.org/colserver/api/core/bitstreams/a2f13d10-4242-4acf-8814-9a3072f3d9c1/content>

⁹ Marie, J. (2021). Seychelles and E-Learning. Seychelles Nation. Retrieved from <https://www.nation.sc/articles/7531/seychelles-and-e-learning>

The enduring lack of adequate infrastructure notwithstanding, the Seychelles Ministry of Education (MoE) deemed the Seychelles to be poised for widespread OER adoption and thus initiated a national policy development process in 2013.

ICT in Education and Training Policy (2014-2019)

Policy Development Process

In 2013, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the support of COL and the Seychellois MoE, appointed Andrew Moore of Neil Butcher & Associates (NBA)¹⁰ as a consultant to facilitate a workshop to support the development of an OER policy. The workshop highlighted the value of OER and facilitated a process for MoE officials to define their strategic priorities, consider licensing options, and outline policy priorities.

Following this workshop, and further rounds of internal discussions and drafting, the MoE released the ICT in Education and Training Policy. The MoE adapted the draft policy to their needs and in 2014, released the ICT in Education and Training Policy (2014-2019), which embedded the use of OER.

Policy Outline

The policy¹¹ sets out the MoE's vision, objectives, and principles in providing strategic direction to the integration of ICT in education and training at all the stages of education and training. It is divided into three sections.

The first section provides an overview of ICT in national development and ICT related to the education and training sector. It also outlines a rationale for an ICT in Education and Training Policy and establishes the following nine strategic policy areas to promote education system transformation:

- Infrastructure and Connectivity;
- Teaching and Learning;
- Open Educational Resources;
- Licensing;
- Administration and Management;
- Human Resources;
- Governance, Implementation and Organisational Arrangements;
- Monitoring and Evaluation; and
- Actioning the Policy.¹²

Section Two contains the vision, scope, goals, and guiding principles for the policy. Section three addresses each of the nine policy areas in detail. The policy calls for the integration of OER as part of the educator's toolset and a ministry initiative to provide open licences for all government produced teaching resources. In particular, the policy makes the following provisions related to OER:

¹⁰ NBA is a South African-based multidisciplinary organization that delivers tailored services to assist clients to achieve their education-related goals. See <https://www.nba.co.za>

¹¹ See https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/seychelles_ict_education_policy.pdf

¹² Ministry of Education, Seychelles. (2014). Information Communications Technology (ICT) in Education and Training Policy - 2014-2019. Retrieved from https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/seychelles_ict_education_policy.pdf

1. Ongoing advocacy and training in OER and OpenCourseWare (OCW) for educators, MoE officials and curriculum and assessment developers to develop and adapt relevant OER and OCW.
2. Licensing original digital content developed by the MoE under an appropriate Creative Commons (CC) open licence agreement and sharing them through the MoE's education portal.
3. Seeking out of OER equivalents for existing textbooks and providing the digital versions that can be accessed on learner and staff digital devices, therefore minimising the purchase of paper-based textbooks.
4. The Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education will develop and adapt an ICT in Education online course from existing OCW that achieves the competencies described in the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (CFT).
5. Adapting OCW and OER to offer a wider set of teacher education online programmes on non-ICT in Education areas to improve the numbers of teachers graduating and entering the profession as well as upskilling those already in the profession.
6. The MoE's authority responsible for Curriculum and Assessment will investigate, collect, store, and distribute quality open digital education materials that match the curriculum objectives and use the education portal to disseminate them.¹³

Review process and development of the ICT in Education and Training Policy (2022-2027)

In 2021, COL approached Mr Moore¹⁴ to review the first policy and develop a new one for the period 2022-2027. In the first phase of the project COL, supported by Mr Moore in his capacity as a consultant, conducted a comprehensive review to examine the original policy's impact and identify new priorities going forward. To this end, Mr Moore developed and administered a teacher survey and interviewed 16 representatives from different areas of the education and training sector, including universities; teacher training institutions; subject matter experts; and representatives of the MoE and Ministry of ICT.

The review showed that although the policy was considered progressive, its impact was small, and it was largely unimplemented. In 2016 – soon after the policy had been published – the MoE was restructured and there was nobody to champion the policy. Different people were brought into the Ministry and priorities shifted. This was viewed as a key barrier to policy implementation.¹⁵

According to Mr Moore, there were attempts by some stakeholders to resurrect the policy and they tried to institute an implementation plan for some elements of the policy such as teacher training. For example, in 2017, a MoE and UNESCO initiative identified seven key actions to prompt policy implementation. These actions included creating instructional materials for use in education; revising pre-service teachers' diploma curriculum; and setting up public-private partnerships to support ICT in education initiatives. However, these efforts did not spur significant shifts. By 2021, activities surrounding the policy had almost completely stagnated and there was very little movement on areas relating to OER and the ICT CFT.¹⁶

¹³ Ministry of Education, Seychelles. (2014). Information Communications Technology (ICT) in Education and Training Policy - 2014-2019. Retrieved from

https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/seychelles_ict_education_policy.pdf

¹⁴ Mr Moore is affiliated with Neil Butcher & Associates. In this instance, COL approached him in his capacity as a consultant.

¹⁵ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

¹⁶ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

In the second phase of the project, based on the findings of the review, COL, the MoE, and other key stakeholders worked together to draft a second policy for the period 2022 to 2027. Instead of developing a completely new policy, it was agreed that it would be more appropriate to revise, update, and extend the original policy. However, given what had been learned from the original policy, it was clear that the new iteration should have explicit allocation of responsibilities and a comprehensive implementation plan, which would include milestones and targets. Thus, in the third phase, COL with the support of Mr Moore, facilitated a process to develop a comprehensive implementation plan, in collaboration with the MoE, to execute the new policy.¹⁷

The revised policy outlines the MoE's vision, objectives, and principles in providing strategic direction for integrating ICT into all stages of education and training over a five-year period. It highlights eight strategic policy areas that seek to enable education and training transformation that contribute to achieving the national goal of a knowledge-based economy within the context of the vision for a knowledge-based society.

The revised ICT in Education and Training Policy (2022-2027) was submitted to the Minister of Education in July 2022. It was finalised in consultation with COL, and was approved by the Cabinet of the Government of Seychelles on October 12, 2022.¹⁸

Successes

The processes for the original ICT in Education Policy and the subsequent one demonstrated key successes regarding OER. The main success of the first policy was the document itself. Andrew Moore, who led both projects on behalf of COL, noted that the MoE and its collaborators came up with a comprehensive, progressive policy. He added that it was well written but was perhaps too detailed and prescriptive.¹⁹

In terms of the second policy, there was a groundswell of opinion that with the right guidance, it was an appropriate time to develop and implement a new policy. Mr Moore explained that there was an implementation plan and a better governance plan. He had supported COL in running some workshops and explained that the teacher community seemed receptive to the idea of a new policy.

At the time of preparing this case study, COL is providing significant support to the MoE for implementing the policy. Some of this support includes building teachers' competencies to integrate ICTs into teaching and learning, strengthening ICT infrastructure, developing open textbooks using a COL supported platform²⁰, and use of the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA)²¹ for teachers and learners.

In the latter part of 2022, the MoE partnered with Internet Service Providers to fast-track the development of ICT infrastructure in all educational institutions to ensure better internet connectivity, improved bandwidth, and Wi-Fi access.

¹⁷ Neil Butcher & Associates. (nd). Revision of the Seychelles ICT in Education and Training Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.nba.co.za/project/revision-seychelles-ict-education-and-training-policy>

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Learning. (2023). Country Report: Africa – Seychelles. Retrieved from <https://oasis.col.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/335e8abf-653d-478a-a491-d8fcbe960fff/content>

¹⁹ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

²⁰ See <https://sidolopenbooks.colvee.org/>

²¹ C-DELTA is COL's long-term programme to promote digital education environments in Commonwealth nations. See <https://cdelta.col.org/>

In 2023, the MoE introduced a new organizational structure. Within this structure, a novel division known as the Technical and Digital Division was established. This division includes a dedicated section specifically designed for Educational Technology. Its primary purpose is to advocate for the ICT in Education and Training Policy (2022-2027) and actively execute the implementation plan. Arising from this policy, the MoE has crafted a comprehensive digital transformation action plan and a digital skills framework, both of which are set to be applied throughout the whole education sector. In addition, a MoE digital transformation committee has been established to ensure the successful implementation of the policy and implementation plan. The committee is chaired by the Principal Secretary and is also responsible for providing effective monitoring and evaluation of the policy. It is, however, too early to tell how much tangible success the new policy will have with these new mechanisms in place, particularly with regard to facilitating access to and use of OER.

Challenges

Many of the challenges experienced with the design of the first policy might be attributed to the fact that ICT and OER had not gained sufficient traction in the Seychelles. Mr Moore explained: ‘The first time I worked on the policy I knew from a project perspective what we wanted to achieve. [The stakeholders in the Seychelles] were keen, open to new ideas, and made the document their own’.²² However, he added that the approach was likely too ambitious in terms of its scope, even though sensibilities had swung in favour of OER.

A key barrier to effective OER implementation may have been that to be optimally successful in creating access to high quality resources, OER need to follow ICT rollout. However, the latter has been patchy in some schools. Some subject teachers, particularly in public schools, were not able to access ICT, so their opportunities to search for, use and adapt OER were constrained.²³

With COVID-19, the MoE saw that the need for educational resources would be significant, so Ministry members put together a task team of teachers to develop OER and add them to a repository.²⁴ This suggests that although the MoE must have perceived some value in OER, they did not necessarily fully appreciate what it meant to integrate OER practices at the national level. It demonstrates a need for education stakeholders to consider potential barriers and bottlenecks in OER implementation, and to think of constructive ways to address these.

A final challenge concerned the Seychellois context. There remains a significant emphasis on the need for infrastructure and connectivity at schools – particularly for primary schools and for non-ICT grade teachers at secondary schools – and many discussions and activities within the MoE still deal with these issues. Effective pedagogy was discussed less frequently, though it was raised by the Ministry of ICT.²⁵ Although ICT is a critical component of OER implementation, pedagogical approaches need to be given equal weighting if meaningful OER practices are to find expression throughout the education system.

Lessons learned

A key lesson from both policy development projects is that effective leadership is important for the policy’s success. Even if there is consensus that the time has come to implement OER, the success of

²² Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

²³ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

²⁴ See <https://theippo.co.uk/online-education-schoolchildren-covid-19-scan-policies-initiatives-around-world/>

²⁵ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023

policy implementation lies in effective leadership as a driving force, as Mr Moore explains. Likewise, a lack of leadership or focus can become systemic and lead to inaction. In parallel, leadership would also need to support a critical mass of infrastructure roll out and ICT capacity building for educators.

Second, although the value proposition of OER is obvious, the amount of effort to source and adapt them is significant. Teachers do not always have the capacity to participate in these activities, so it may be useful to consider other opportunities that do not depend solely on teachers. NBA's work in Zanzibar provides an example of alternatives to consider. The Zanzibar Institute of Education sources and quality assures OER, links them to the Zanzibar curriculum, and adds them to the repository for teachers to access.²⁶ This reduces pressure on the teachers to fulfil this function.

In terms of enablers that could have been put in place to create and sustain a government policy and a conducive regulatory environment for OER, there was supposed to be an ICT in Education committee of experts. The idea was that the committee would convene on a regular basis. The MoE had identified who they wanted on the committee and letters were drafted and sent out, but the first meeting was never convened.²⁷ Consequently, one of the key lessons was that an expert group providing direction and advice for policy implementation would have been useful. Similarly, the original policy sought to build a repository as part of the OER implementation, but this was never fully realised and provides a lesson on the usefulness of this kind of intervention to support policy implementation in future. Both examples provide insights into the importance of creating and sustaining enablers to create a conducive environment for policy implementation.

Conclusion

While national policies that contain OER commitments hold great promise in mainstreaming OER practices, this case study argues that such policies are greatly dependent on an enabling environment to make them a success. This includes having adequate infrastructure, strong governance mechanisms such as clear delineation of responsibilities, champions to drive implementation, and teaching and learning capacity including pre- and in-service teacher training. Given the groundswell in the popularity of OER in the Seychelles, together with accompanying efforts to improve ICT capacity, skills and policy implementation, the Seychelles is poised to use its new, streamlined policy as a tool to mainstream OER.

²⁶ Currently at <https://zanzibarvle.org>

²⁷ Interview with Andrew Moore (Consultant, Neil Butcher & Associates), 10 January 2023