Education Specialist stresses on the importance of Open Educational Resources

An expert in E-Learning, Dr Sanjaya Mishra from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) believes higher education institutions should now adapt to Open Educational Resources (OER) to contribute to the development of open knowledge.

Dr Mishra who has over 25 years of experience in design, development and management of open and distance learning programmes held a public lecture at the Fiji National University (FNU) Nasinu Campus yesterday (Monday, 11 March), where he spoke on the topic 'Open Educational Resources in the South Pacific'.

Education Specialist Dr Sanjaya Mishra during a public lecture at FNU.

Around hundred people, including FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey, Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching Professor James Pounder, academics, staff and students attended the lecture organised by FNU's Learning and Teaching Department. The session was also live streamed to other FNU Campuses.

The academic described Open Educational Resources as "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium that resides in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use in some instances."

"OER improves digital skills, it reduces the costs of buying text books, enhances access to information and improves the quality of life," said Dr Mishra.

He said OER has been adapted by many developed and developing countries globally.

"Pacific countries such as Fiji, Australia and New Zealand support the OER. These countries also have national policy on OER. Tonga, at the same time has also developed a draft policy in this area," said Dr Mishra.

"In many countries, parents are not able to send their children to higher education institutions even though they have a single child. This is because of increased cost. This, I mean the rising cost of text books. In some countries, importing text books further increases the cost."

"So the solution to all these problems is to encourage the open licensing of educational materials and encourage the development and adaptation of OER," he said.

Two major Open Educational Resources platforms are Wikieducator and OpenLearn.

"Unfortunately there are some barriers to mainstreaming of OER which is lack of appropriate knowledge amongst the users and lack of support from the institution," added Dr Mishra.

"Following the devastation wreaked by cyclone Gita in February last year, Tonga used the open educational resources through Aptus, a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations with access to digital resources," he said.

The E-Learning specialist also called on the governments to support open educational resources in educational institutions.

FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey thanked Dr Mishra for his visit to FNU and the knowledge he shared with the staff and students on the importance of E-learning.

The VC also informed Dr Mishra on FNU's transformation towards Digital Learning.

"The Fijian Government invested over a billion dollar in Education sector in the budget. FNU received direct grant as well as 20 million dollars as capital grant which simply means the government is bringing about huge improvement in the education sector," said Professor Healey.

"The cost and speed of data is cheaper and faster in Fiji when compared to many other countries. FNU has a very fast broadband. For students, we have free unlimited WIFI all across the campus," he said.

FNU recently opened a half-a-million dollars "Learning Commons" a digital library providing more interactive, collaborative and inclusive learning environment for students at its Koronivia Campus.

Bio: Dr Sanjaya Mishra joined COL as Education Specialist: eLearning at its headquarters in Canada on 2 January 2015. Previously, he served COL as Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) from 1 July 2012 to 31 December 2014. Dr Mishra is one of the leading scholars in open, distance and online Learning. Prior to joining COL, he was Programme Specialist (ICT in Education, Science and Culture) at UNESCO, Paris.