Bridging SoTL and Open Educational Resources/Practices (OER/P) Through Tagore's Southern Theory in the Era of a Pandemic

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Abstract

In recent times, while Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and pedagogy enabled by open educational resources/practices (OER/P-enabled pedagogy) have become paramount in higher education, both have hardly been addressed jointly. Given that both aim to adopt, share, and reuse open resources by lecturers and their students in higher education institutions, it would have been expected that both are conjointly used to enhance student learning instead of being used separately. Additionally, while studies are ongoing from different theoretical stances, SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy research are considered separately. Consequently, and through systematic review, the current study aims at bridging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy through Tagore's southern theory in the era of a pandemic in the educational setting.

Tagore's southern theory can demonstrate and explain the tacit linkage between SoTL via OER/P. Accordingly, Tagore's southern theory should be used in broadening and deepening our understanding and thus serve as a guiding principle to approach SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy conjointly. One key implication is that while it is important to conceptualize the global design of teaching and learning, it is vitally important to take account of local histories. Thus, the culturally entrenched connotations and interpretations for inclusive education can be addressed by employing both SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy simultaneously. The hope is that the research assists in grounding the future of SoTL via OER/P-enabled pedagogy exploration.

Introduction

After Boyer (1990, p. 24) first coined the term *scholarship of teaching,* which distinguished it from the other three scholarships (*discovery*, *integration*, and *application*), over time, an additional construct termed *learning,* emphasizing students, led to the universal term *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)*. Although the *learning* part was added, SoTL continued to evolve as good teaching, scholarly teaching, and the scholarship of teaching prevailed with the intent of publicizing results (Potter & Kustra, 2011; Vajoczki et al., 2011). Despite principles extended to enhance student learning, outlining what SoTL is and is not remains challenging. The reason is primarily valid because "scholars of teaching and learning come from all disciplines and often bring their disciplinary lenses to studying these processes" (Simmons et al., 2013, p. 1). Notwithstanding, proponents of SoTL who tend to promote multidisciplinary, and disciplinarity approaches through SoTL are particularly fraught (e.g., Huber & Morreale, 2002). For instance, the argument is that much of SoTL's position originates from the humanities.

Consequently, there has been an urge to broaden the conception to address a broader range of issues, particularly during the pandemic (e.g., Chick, 2013). Moreover, SoTL researchers come from various backgrounds and cultures, and thus diverse perspectives and interpretations need further exploration. Additionally, the seminal study of Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2010, p. 5) highlights the challenges of *inclusive education*, which the recent COVID-19 has already worsened. The study created the need to examine open educational resources and practices (OER/P) in most educational disciplines. Furthermore, *inclusion* also remains a difficult task to unpack. For instance:

> The meaning of *inclusion* is by no means clear and, perhaps conveniently, blurs the edges of social policy with feel-good rhetoric that no one could be opposed... What does it mean to have an education system that is "inclusive"? Who needs inclusion and why? If education should be inclusive, what practices is it contesting, what shared values is it advocating, and by what criteria should its successes be judged? (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 5)

The challenge from Armstrong et al. (2010, p. 5) is the persistent debates that plague SoTL (Marín, Orellana & Peré, 2019; UNESCO, 2019). For example, Marín et al. (2019), along with others such as Peters and Roberts (2011) and Schuwer and Janssen (2018), assert that *inclusivity* for *teaching and learning* in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic may well be promoted by and aided through OER-enabled platform. Although there is no official definition, OER/P-enabled pedagogy, as described by UNESCO, is:

> Learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under the copyright that has been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, reuse, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others. (UNESCO, 2019, p. 3)

Therefore, the argument is that the relevance of theory and context is always appropriate when examining SoTL, and even more so with OER/P-enabled pedagogy in the era of a pandemic, thus laying the foundation for the use of Tagore's southern theory. The central tenet of Tagore's southern theory is that learning through any form should provide for and be connected to both the learner's social and cultural contexts. The implication is that SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy should be phenomena that tend to stimulate critical thinking and creative imagination in learners' contexts. Consequently, the theory provides an understanding of the work of intellectuals and social theorists from the Global South (Connell, 2011; Tagore, 1906, 1892). It is possible to simultaneously reframe how to analyze educational resources and practice to trace a profound and additional inclusive understanding of SoTL.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to bridge SoTL and OER/P through Tagore's southern theory in the era of a pandemic. The purpose is partially found in Dhawan's (2020) assertion. The assertion is that the narrower viewpoint of SoTL alone may not account for nor resolve the current online *teaching and learning inquiry,* and thus its *scholarship,* which should have been *a panacea* in the time of the COVID-19 crisis, hence the need for the current study as guided by the following aim.

Aims of study

The current study examined the use of Tagore's southern theory in bridging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy.

Literature Review

Implementation of ER/P in the era of a pandemic

The study's purpose and aim have been built on the continuing debates regarding the domain of SoTL, coupled with the emergence of OER/P-enabled pedagogy as a digital-enabled platform for teaching and learning. While such debates about the domain and platform are inherently interdisciplinary, responses have instead been incoherent, with deep-rooted disciplinary differences coupled with worldviews regarding domain and platform. The effect of the debates has also led to the disjointed application of SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy. Accordingly, the current research delved into the discourse on re/conceptualizing SoTL via OER/P in the pandemic era to highlight the need to bridge SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy. A theoretical stance called Tagore's southern theory assisted in connecting SoTL via OER/P. Such an endeavor was achieved through other studies, including but not limited to the works of Connell (2007), Epstein and Morrell (2012), and Hickling-Hudson (2011). Due to the purpose of the study as noted earlier, I draw on the views of Comaroff and Comaroff (2011) and Hubball and Clarke (2010). For instance, Comaroff and Comaroff's (2011) work helps to examine theory from the South and how Euro-America is evolving towards Africa and thus the Global South. On the other hand, Hubball and Clarke (2010) offer an anchor to explore the diverse methodological approaches and considerations for SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy in higher education. Some implications and conclusions of Tagore's southern theory on SoTL via OER/P-enabled pedagogy were evaluated to avoid an assemblage of ideas. The study also builds on Dhawan's (2020) lamentation of the narrower view of SoTL. I connect the work of Peters and Roberts (2011) with Marín et al. (2019) regarding the virtues of openness scholarship in the digital era. Accordingly, the view on using open educational practice to conduct research in the university, as explained by Masterman (2016) in Dhawan's (2020) work on online learning, is also examined and linked with the operational definition of OER/P as offered by UNESCO (2019). Building on the operational definition by UNESCO (2019), this paper examines *inclusivity* for *teaching and learning*, as alluded to by Wiley and Hilton (2018). The evaluation of both UNESCO (2019) and Wiley and Hilton (2018) was made possible by making a case for OER/P-enabled pedagogy and researchers' adoption, sharing, and reuse of open resources during SoTL. Regarding the unresolved contestations, the paper draws from literature on SoTL, including but not limited to the work of Poole (2013) and Young and Yeo (2015).

Within the discourse about the implementation of teaching as well as learning pedagogies via OER/P in the era of a pandemic, several responses are advanced as to what that means (Australian Government, 2020; Bahman, 2021; Department for Education, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; OECD, 2020; Sawant et al., 2021).

For instance, in response to the unclear meaning of *inclusivity* for *teaching and learning inquiry,* as alluded to by earlier researchers such as Armstrong et al. (2010) and proponents of SoTL, a

few options have been proposed. For example, Peters and Roberts (2011), Schuwer and Janssen (2018), and Wiley and Hilton (2018) highlight the merits of open scholarship within the digital space. While a collective approach has not yet been developed, Peters and Roberts (2011) suggest possible merit in introducing the virtues of open education in areas such as science scholarship in the digital age. Equally, adopting, sharing, and reusing open resources by lecturers in higher education (Schuwer & Janssen, 2018) are prominent features for a well-defined OER/P-enabled pedagogy for open/distance learning and contact learning (Wiley & Hilton, 2018). Meanwhile, some scholars have suggested OER/P for research training (Marín et al., 2019) and using OER/P in research universities (Masterman, 2016).

Additionally, while virtual learning environments (VLE) such as Moodle, MS Teams, and Blackboard are not fully understood, their implementations or usage are ill-informed due in part to the lack of integration with SoTL (Bahman, 2021; Sawant et al., 2021). For instance, Bahman (2021) investigated VLEs in a post-COVID era, leading to the need to unpack the challenges and opportunities for the global implementation of e-learning frameworks. On the other hand, Sawant et al. (2021) advocate for the classification of approaches for evaluating students' performance in the Covid-19 pandemic in response to SoTL. The logic in the work of both Bahman (2021) and Sawant et al. (2021) is built upon the work of Dhawan (2020). Reacting to and connecting with the work is a conclusion that online learning and teaching (OER/P -enabled pedagogy) is a universal remedy in the time of the COVID-19 crisis and hence needs to be linked with SoTL. Anchored upon mentioned studies, one question that remains unresolved is the effective conceptualizing of online (OER/P-enabled pedagogy) teaching and learning pedagogies via SoTL.

Re-conceptualizing SoTL via OER/P in the era of a pandemic: Response to inclusive education

In the past two decades, far more scholarship has been conducted on separate accounts related to SoTL, as indicated in the introductory section, with varying conclusions (i.e., Bernstein, 2010; Chick, 2013; Poole, 2013; Nelson, 2003). For instance, Bernstein (2010) highlights the need to find one's place in the scholarship of teaching and to learn in response to inclusive education. However, due to what Poole (2013) highlights as *controversies, debates, and tensions in SoTL,* Nelson (2003) suggests that the different genres of the scholarship of teaching and learning, including OER/P, should ensure inclusivity. Lack of inclusivity could result in misused power and privilege in the scholarship of teaching and learning to the detriment of many, as Chick (2013) shows. The conclusion is that it is imperative to use SoTL to enhance student learning and research as a new direction for online teaching and learning*, hence* OER/P-enabled pedagogy *(*Dickson & Trem, 2013). The SoTL trend is equally true of OER/P (Baas et al., 2019; Belikov & Bodily, 2016). For example, while we do not fully comprehend the adoption rate, Baas et al. (2019) hinted at the need for teachers to adopt open educational resources in higher education for *interactive media for* OER/P -enabled pedagogy to enhance student learning engagement through educational technology. Consequently, Belikov and Bodily (2016) have highlighted the need to consider OER/P adoption's incentives to improve education openness (Clinton, 2019). Like SoTL, OER/P, too, has evolved. For instance, Baas et al. (2019)

investigated teachers' adoption of OER/P in higher education. Even so, Belikov and Bodily (2016) highlight the need to explore the incentives and barriers to OER/P adoption.

Theoretical Stance

SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy via Tagore's Southern theory: Response to pedagogical and curriculum inclusivity

Two questions stand out when considering SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy via Tagore's Southern theory. The fundamental questions are: what contexts are relevant for Tagore's southern theory, what is it, and what is its relevance to the current study?

The context
The influence of the pandemic on learners and teachers resulted in critical demands, as reflected in the introductory and literature sections. Such demands have been along the lines of prioritizing scholarship of teaching and learning, along with educational resources/practices, and delivering inclusive practice that may support long-term development. Generally, the main context of southern theory is that various disciplinary studies being guided and simultaneously shaped by issues relevant to such thinkers and their experiences are often overlooked and pushed to disciplinary peripherals, particularly in SoTL and OER/P, hence the need for Tagore's southern theory. The implication is to deliver a socially inclusive provision in an ever-changing context, accounting for the learner's social and cultural context. Such an implication addresses the context required by Tagore's southern theory in bridging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy.

Tagore's southern theory implication for the current study
Applying Tagore's theoretical stance suggests that a student-centric, culturally inclusive, and locally-oriented perspective is required to analyze the pedagogy, thus ensuring "border thinking" (Mukherjee, 2017, p. 538). Similarly, Alcoff (2007) notes a "reconstructive project [which] demands not only a new sociology of knowledge but also a new normative epistemology that can correct and improve upon the colonial worldview" (p. 83). Such new normative epistemology, seen not only in SoTL but also via OER/P-enabled pedagogy, has led to a need to produce greater understanding related to Global South educational problems. Though there are various southern theories, in the current study, I use Tagore's southern theory of education and application to reframe OER/P to respond to inclusive education in the era of a pandemic. Tagore (1906) advanced the notion that

> Education is a relational process between the child, teacher, peers, and nature (environment), the child's experience is central to the educational process; the curriculum and pedagogic approach should revolve around the child's aptitude and ability; the teacher's role is central to the pedagogic process in nurturing creativity and critical thinking (as against preparing kids for tests by rote-memorizing school textbooks); education for the whole child, which nourishes the heart and the intellect involving social and emotional learning as well as for vocation (livelihood); education should be community-oriented and should foster values of cooperation as against competition. (p. 34)

In connecting both the context and the definition of Tagore's southern theory, what is then essential is its implication for the current study. Tagore's southern theory of education offers several implications. The first is to question universalism associated with social theory. Specifically, Tagore's southern theory of education and application critiques the dominant position associated with Western perceptions and models (Epstein & Morrell, 2012; Hickling-Hudson, 2009; Connell, 2007, 2013). Another implication is that the theory encourages the identification of alternative philosophical stances, precepts, thinkers, and particular contexts, which for the most part, are overlooked by so-called mainstream/popular academics and regions. Ultimately, its principal thesis is to empower overlooked philosophers and thinkers beyond trans-Atlantic modeling and perspectives. Consequently, it attempts to focus on experiences akin to the context of the thinkers. Thus, OER/P-enabled pedagogy, and hence SoTL, which both arise from Global North researchers and hence are framed with northern theory, tend to originate from the colonial metropole. Consequently, they are provincial by nature and thus exclude the narratives of some people. For instance, the phenomena give rise to inadequate understanding of OER/P-enabled pedagogy and hence SoTL. Their centering in the North also leads to misinterpretation, alienation, and insufficient knowledge of the Global South's learning pedagogies. Therefore, considering analytic (ideological) and hermeneutic (affective historical) elements could improve SoTL via OER/P-enabled pedagogy. Mukherjee (2017) further opines that "education should also foster intercultural learning to promote global consciousness to counter hatred based on cultural understandings" (p. 538).

From the analysis, one key implication remains rife for consideration, particularly in connecting SoTL and OER/P -enabled pedagogy. The ramification is that nations need to use education to create notions of identity and citizenship. Thus, while exploring SoTL, it is crucial to assess OER/P -enabled pedagogy to reduce exclusion. In fact, in understanding SoTL separately, some scholars have continuously lamented global design and local histories, consequently questioning the culturally embedded meaning-making for inclusive education (Mukherjee, 2017).

Discussion

In summary, this paper examined the use of Tagore's southern theory in bridging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy. The paper concludes there is a need to comprehend the nuances of southern theory in re/conceptualizing SoTL via OER/P. In that respect, while both SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy are geared toward enhancing student learning, several challenges remain. As a result, analysis of both literature and theory provides grounds for bridging the divide between SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy through Tagore's southern theory. For instance, while SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy have become paramount in higher education, both have hardly been addressed jointly, despite that both aim to enhance student learning.

Additionally, while there are ongoing studies from different theoretical stances, it was also evidenced that often, SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy research is individually addressed. Consequently, using Tagore's southern theory provides a much-needed motivation (Connell, 2007). While we still do not fully comprehend all the challenges associated with the implementation of SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy, Connell (2011) proposes that in

confronting inequality, for example, knowledge and global change via southern theory would undoubtedly assist in contributing to pedagogical and curriculum developments. One implication is the realization of the difference of opinion, control, and opportunity in the scholarship of teaching and learning. An additional implication is that while it is important to conceptualize and thus communicate SoTL in a manner that meets global design, it is vitally important to take account of the local histories and thus the culturally rooted meanings for inclusive education. The other implication could be the facilitation of student engagement through educational technology to avoid fallacies of SoTL through the avoidance of controversies and tensions in SoTL (Poole, 2013). Thus, the application of southern theory improves teaching and learning pedagogies by invariably merging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy.

Other key reasons to examine SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy are as follows. Besides presenting the opportunity to closely examine SoTL via OER/P in the era of a pandemic as a response to inclusive education, first, digital technology services in all human endeavors are on the increase with varying conceptualization. In response, Africa and the Global South's higher education sector must demonstrate the propensity to facilitate such services within their contexts. The response could also involve adequate adoption, sharing, and reusing of open resources by Africa and the Global South's higher education researchers while involved in SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy (Wiley & Hilton, 2018). Further, adequate adoption in the context of Africa is necessary because, while disciplinary debates within SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy are gaining prominence, the additional challenge of inequality, as suggested by Connell (2011), remains unresolved. European and North American research ignores the contexts and experiences of teaching and learning in the African context and thus the Global South context (Dhawan, 2020; Mukherjee, 2018, 2019; Young & Yeo, 2015). For example, Mukherjee (2019) shows how sometimes, due to the narrow stances or discipline-specific views of SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy by the trans-Atlantic regions, hardly any research takes account of the African context. Accordingly, we require the conjoint nature of SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy in the Global South context. Accordingly, if assumptions underlying SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy are unlinked and unchecked, inequality inevitably results. Problematically, homogenous domains of knowledge tend to originate from the economic knowledge structure of colonialism and the current Global North, leading to misunderstanding of the Global South. In response, using southern and postcolonial perspectives in SoTL and OER/P assumptions is vital. Hence, it is necessary to reconsider various paradigms regarding learning theories and flexible pedagogies predicated upon the Global South's teaching and learning support platforms.

Conclusion

While the current theoretical paper does not attempt to address all unresolved questions, it uses an integrated literature review to argue that by bridging SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy, we can get beyond the fragmented disciplinary debates. Accordingly, it proposes that Tagore's southern theory should be used in broadening and deepening our understanding and thus serve as a guiding principle to approach SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy conjointly. One key implication is that while it is important to conceptualize the global design of teaching and learning, it is vitally important to take account of the local histories. It thus addresses the

culturally entrenched connotations and interpretations for inclusive education by employing both SoTL and OER/P-enabled pedagogy simultaneously. The hope is that the research assists in grounding the future of SoTL via OER/P-enabled pedagogy exploration.

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