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ABIMBOLA WINDAPO'S OPEN TEXTBOOK JOURNEY

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Position: Professor

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Faculty: Engineering and the Built Environment

Course: Construction Management I and Construction Technology

Degree level: Undergraduate

Title of textbook: *Fundamentals of Construction Management*

Introduction

With more than 33 years of experience in the construction field – as a Registered Construction Project Manager in South Africa and a Registered Builder in Nigeria – Dr Abimbola Windapo brings a wealth of knowledge to her teaching across a range of construction management courses. A Professor in the Department of Construction Economics and Management at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Abimbola has developed an impressive set of teaching notes that she likes to share directly with her students, many of whom cannot afford the expensive textbooks that are sometimes prescribed in construction management courses. After years of refining her notes, she reached out to an online book publisher in 2015 to help her transform them into an open textbook that she wanted to: (a) look professionally designed, and (b) be freely available for students to access online. With the help of a commercial publisher (hereafter referred to as 'the publisher') she was able to achieve these goals with the publication of her book *Fundamentals of Construction Management*.¹

Fundamentals of Construction Management

Dr. Abimbola Windapo



¹ <https://bit.ly/3i6F3Bp>

The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) project in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at the University of Cape Town (UCT) provided grant funding and implementation support to 10 open textbook projects in the period from March 2018 – March 2019, as well as implementation support to an 11th initiative. The Open Textbook Journeys series tells the stories of the people driving these initiatives, their teaching and publishing processes and what inspires them to do this work. These case studies were developed in collaboration with and reviewed by the open textbook authors profiled.

While Abimbola had long considered herself an open education advocate, it was with the publication of her textbook that she began to learn more about the various debates within the open education movement and their implications for her work. That is, she initially thought her book was an 'open textbook' because it was 'free'. However, as she came to learn, it was only free 'gratis' (no price barrier), but not free 'libre' (legally open for reuse and distribution without permission). Thus, even though her students could get PDF copies of her book for free (which was vitally important for her), she could not share the textbook on open platforms like the OpenUCT repository for others to find, download, use and re-share. Everyone had to get their copies via the publisher's portal after registering with the site. It was not a truly open textbook. To overcome this, Abimbola reached out to DOT4D to help navigate the process of making her current textbook fully open. This case study discusses the open textbook journey that Abimbola embarked on with DOT4D and their engagement with the publisher to try and make her textbook fully open. Was Abimbola successful in her quest? We shall see.

This case study draws on:

- Interviews (x2) with the DOT4D Researcher.
- Field notes of the DOT4D Publishing and Implementation Manager.

What is the problem Abimbola is trying to address?

Given that there is a symbiotic relationship between construction management as an academic discipline and as a professional practice (where new innovations, standards and guidelines are fed back into the classroom), Abimbola wanted to bridge these worlds by sharing the latest academic research on construction management with students and educators, as well as industry professionals. As such, she wanted to do it in a way that was accessible to all parties.

Prior to engaging with DOT4D, Abimbola had already published *Fundamentals of Construction Management* with the publisher. Technically, it was already a 'free' textbook, thus it went a long way in achieving her core desire for the book. However, the problem was: it was not a fully open textbook. Thus she sought help in finding a way to make the book fully open (hosted on the OpenUCT repository under a Creative Commons licence).

It was only free 'gratis' (no price barrier), but not free 'libre' (legally open for reuse and distribution without permission)

Textbook conventions in the discipline

Abimbola explained that the decisions around prescribed textbooks for courses in her department were made by course convenors, allowing them a sense of autonomy and control in the process. They based their decisions on what they were trying to achieve in the course. They often collected materials from multiple textbooks and resources and compiled them into a course reader for the students' use. She stated that 'it's based on the contents, so what is expected, what are you supposed to deliver, and then you now prescribe certain textbooks that have that content. Not all textbooks will have everything, so you pick and choose a textbook because you think it's good and it has so many citations, it's published by a good publisher and so on'.

Abimbola's open textbook journey

Original plan

Abimbola started her open textbook creation and conceptualisation journey with the development of an open educational resource (OER) – a set of lecture notes that she shared online. She initially shared this compilation of notes, which she had been developing since 1997, with her students through the learning management system as a supplementary reader titled 'Construction Technology I' in 2010. Students then used these notes as reference materials, with some asking whether they could be incorporated into the course reader which they would receive as part of their course fee. But this never materialised.

In response, however, Abimbola made her supplemental notes openly available in the OpenUCT institutional repository as two different but related resources – 'Construction Technology I Part A & B'² and 'Building Services Study Guide'³.

² <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/2507>

³ <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/4143>

Abimbola then decided to develop the notes into an open textbook as a way of protecting the content that she had produced from being misused or sold at a fee to students if she was ever removed from the course. She also envisioned this as a way of protecting her copyright and being acknowledged as the creator of this resource. She had learnt about this the hard way while guest lecturing at a different institution, revealing that, after she ‘developed comprehensive notes for the assigned course ... I was taken off the course. And the notes that I developed and used in teaching are now being used by someone else ... I invested my time in developing those notes and then the following year you are told that ‘no, we don’t need you’. It’s disheartening’. Thus, she wanted to assert greater legal control over her notes and ensure that she received proper credit for them.

Abimbola wanted to use her textbook to create more locally relevant content that represented local practices and experiences

Abimbola began sharing her work openly with the vision that it would be found useful by a variety of groups, namely: construction management students across South Africa, construction management educators, and construction management professionals in the public (government) and private sectors (consultants/contractors). Making her teaching materials open was also part of her professional identity as an open education practitioner, in that she felt knowledge should be openly available for all. In her teaching, Abimbola believed that one important contribution she could make to the transformation of her discipline would be to teach the basic principles and fundamentals of construction management. As part of this, she enjoyed highlighting local construction management practices and non-conventional building approaches, such as those found in rural areas (thereby shifting the usual focus of the discipline away from its urban bias). As she stated, she made a point to discuss the construction of ‘traditional buildings with traditional technology. We don’t ignore traditional construction technology, so we examine the techniques used as well’. As such, Abimbola wanted to use her textbook to create more locally relevant content that represented local practices and experiences.

Authorship approach

In the production of her first OER, ‘Construction Technology I Part A & B’, Abimbola adopted a ‘solo author with student involvement’ approach. That is, she authored the text herself and then asked students to help her in the production of images and graphics to support the content. Her OER, ‘Building Services Study Guide’, was co-authored with her son, Bayonle Windapo (a student in the Department of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at UCT), who produced all of the images. She involved her students in this work as a way of helping build their research capacity. ‘So I give them assignments and ask them to go and develop some of those courses as well...so you have to be able to delegate and give other people the opportunity.’ As such, she saw the textbook development process as a mentorship opportunity.

In terms of the production of the final textbook product, *Fundamentals of Construction Management*, Abimbola worked as a solo author, reusing the visual material created by her students during her OER development process.

Abimbola stated that she preferred to work as a sole author ‘because books are usually based on the approach or style a particular lecturer has to teaching. It is an extension to your being. This is similar to the debate between decolonised education. Some believe in it, while others don’t. You need to be fortunate to find a scholar that shares your particular views on how a particular subject should be taught’. Thus, with the textbook being so closely aligned with her own teaching, the solo author approach made the most sense.

The content development process and student involvement

Abimbola included students (particularly her Masters and PhD candidates) in all her content creation processes. These students were predominantly involved in the creation of drawings for the resources, with PhD students participating in the research aspect of her content creation process. She ensured that all students who participated were acknowledged in the resources.

Abimbola saw this work with her students as a contract that she had to fulfil; within this context, she also ensured that students were reimbursed for their contributions.

Publishing process

Abimbola explored different publishing processes in the production of her work. She began her journey of publishing open content by sharing two open education resources, 'Construction Technology I: Part A & B'⁴ (2012) and 'Building Services Study Guide'⁵ (with co-author Bayonle Windapo, 2013), on the OpenUCT repository.

She then went on to publish her textbook, *Fundamentals of Construction Management*, with the publisher in 2015. The fact that the publisher provided professional editorial and layout services as part of the publishing process was an important consideration for Abimbola, as she felt that the professionalism of the final product was crucial if students were to engage with it and if it were to have an impact on industry.

Abimbola chose to publish with this external commercial publisher because of its 'open access' approach which allows students to use its textbooks for free. This is financed through advertising and subscriptions. The publisher currently has a list of almost 3,000 textbooks and ebooks which can be read online or downloaded as PDFs. The publisher's 'open access' approach 'allows users to:

- use the textbook for teaching and education without compensating the author;
- link to the eBook on the publisher's website; and
- distribute the textbook for non-commercial purposes via sending a link'.⁶

While these affordances are valuable – especially for students – in terms of facilitating access to the published work, the content published cannot be said to be authentically open access because the resource is not openly licensed. As discussed above, the publisher's titles are 'gratis' (i.e. with no price barrier) but not 'libre' (i.e. legally open for reuse and distribution without permission),⁷ and thus do not qualify as open textbooks in terms of the definition used by the DOT4D project and the international open education community.

The professionalism of the final product was crucial if students were to engage with it and if it were to have an impact on industry

The publisher's terms and conditions state that their titles may not be used in any commercial sense without written permission, and authors may not upload PDFs of published versions to a website or server.⁸ Thus, some of the pedagogical and distributional virtues of the 'libre' element that normally reside in an open access resource are absent here.

The publisher currently offers access to Abimbola's textbook through two different channels on its website:

1. **Students – Free:** Readers who click 'sign up for free access' must register to receive a free account which allows them to access 1,000+ non-business textbooks via an online reader or by downloading them as PDFs. Both approaches contain ads, though the publisher says that these ads should not comprise more than 15% of a book's total space.
2. **Business – Free 30-day trial, then \$5.99/month subscription:** By registering for this option, users can access the non-business textbooks (such as Abimbola's) and the 1,700+ business ebooks. No advertising is included in the books viewed or downloaded through this trial/subscription option.

However, in the course of collaborating with the DOT4D project, Abimbola became aware of the limitations that the lack of an open licence exerted in terms of the openness that she desired for her work as an open education practitioner.

When re-examining her publication agreement with the publisher, she expressed: 'Maybe I didn't understand what I was getting into.'

In order to try and remedy this, Abimbola worked with the DOT4D Publication and Implementation Manager (PIM) to explore an alternative licensing and distribution approach for her (already published) textbook that would bring it closer in line with a fully open access text. This approach would, of course, have to include the consent of the publisher.

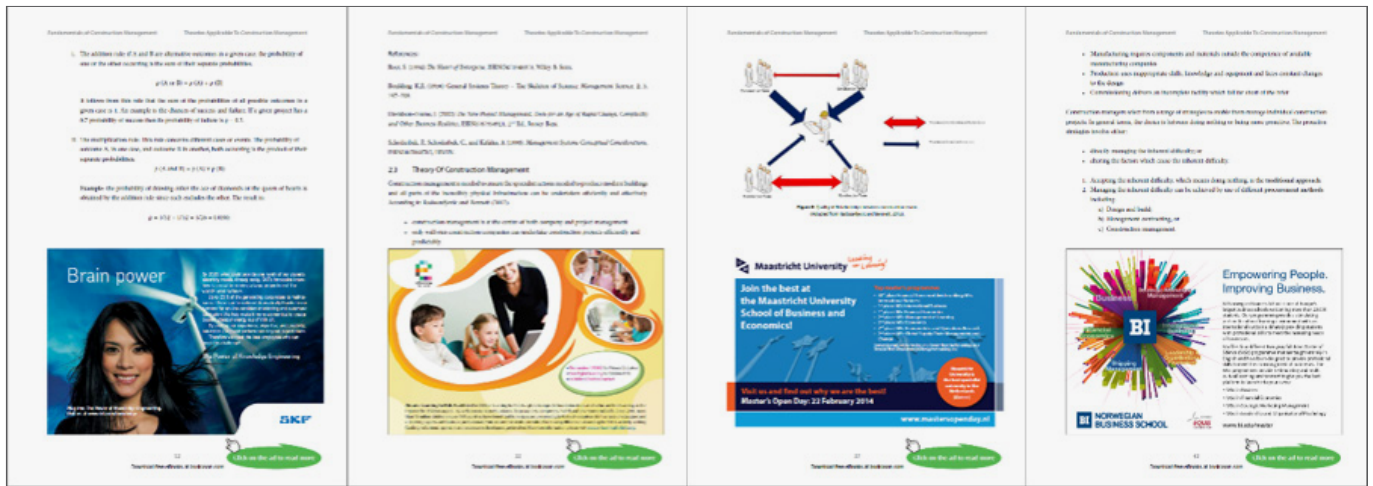
⁴ <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/2507>

⁵ <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/4143>

⁶ <https://bit.ly/3kSRbZq>

⁷ <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/08-02-08.htm#gratis-libre>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/3kSRbZq>



The cost of 'free': advertisements in the published textbook

Abimbola became aware of the limitations that the lack of an open licence exerted in terms of the openness that she desired for her work as an open education practitioner

exploring avenues through which the preprint version could be shared, but there were concerns around quality and the degree to which the preprint would vary from the published version of record.

The publisher negotiation process was disappointing for Abimbola, but she did not have the legal leverage to change the situation.

Content development and publishing tools

In all her publishing processes, Abimbola used MS Word to author the text and do the page layout. Her students used graphics software to generate the images.

Copyright and licensing

The author did not experience any challenges around copyright and licensing in the development of her original OER as she was guided in her approach by a UCT staff member as part of a prior UCT grant she received. Her challenges with copyright and licensing arose in the formal publishing process.

Quality assurance and sustainability

Abimbola's approach towards quality assurance for her two OER included review by a colleague for content and accuracy. She also engaged external editors and proofreaders.

To ensure the quality of her textbook, Abimbola edited for clarity and sought out high quality images and diagrams. These efforts were supported by external editors, professional proofreaders and her students. The quality assurance process was extended through the professional layout and design services provided by the publisher.

The DOT4D PIM proposed the following to the publisher. Given that the publisher had recently contacted Abimbola in order to request updates for a second edition (for which Abimbola had already received galley proofs), would it be possible to share the first edition of this work on the OpenUCT repository with a Creative Commons licence and link to the updated edition on the the publisher's website?

This seemed like a win-win proposition. The value of an older edition typically goes down precipitously for a publisher once a new edition comes out, thus Abimbola and the PIM reasoned that the publisher would benefit with a new edition, while students, educators and practitioners would be able to choose between a fully open first edition on the institutional repository or a modestly restricted (though still free) updated edition. A representative of the publishing company responded by stating that they were happy for Abimbola to link to the book from a website, but that senior approval would be required in order to upload a PDF.

To this the PIM responded that, in terms of the UCT definition of an open textbook, the work requires an open licence, and that they would need to upload a PDF rather than merely link to the publisher website.

At the time of writing there had not been any response from the publisher. Abimbola and the PIM were instead

In addition, the prior use of the book's materials in class, before it was published as a textbook, contributed to quality assurance as years of student feedback in the courses helped improve the content. Most importantly, the publisher required that the textbook go through the publisher's review process and address reviewer comments before the work could be published.

In her interview, Abimbola stated that achieving a high level of quality for the textbook was paramount, affecting readers' interest in the book and colleagues' level of respect for her work. 'If it's not ready, then people will not use it ... Putting out that kind of resource, you don't want to be subjected to ridicule in the academic community ... You have to make sure that once the work is finished, you will receive accolades.'

Challenges experienced and lessons learned

Some decisions cannot be undone

Abimbola had already published her textbook when she got in touch with DOT4D, thus there were no challenges in the development process. Those had already taken place in the years prior when she created the book. The challenge came in trying to get the publisher to grant her permission to share her first edition of the book under an open licence, free for anybody to use and redistribute as they saw fit. Unfortunately, in that regard, she was unsuccessful. The publisher did not have any real incentive to change the conditions under which her book was being distributed on its platform and, furthermore, it did not have a second edition yet from her.

The challenge came in trying to get the publisher to grant her permission to share her first edition of the book under an open licence, free for anybody to use and redistribute as they saw fit

Now she knows. Now we know too!

As an open educator, Abimbola felt that she had learned an ironic, but important, lesson. When she published the book in 2015, she wanted it to be free for students and openly accessible. In a very important respect, she achieved this because her book is free of charge. It is just that it cannot be freely shared like a normal openly licensed textbook can. For students, this may not matter so much, because price is often the key consideration for their interest. It is free of charge: job done! But for other academics and construction management practitioners, the lack of an open licence inhibits their ability to re-use, adapt, translate or share the book as they wish. This is unfortunate, but a valuable lesson for all open education authors and advocates as they decide how to release their work.