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A FRAMEWORK MODEL FOR THE DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:
This study aims to present a 3-axis model for the distance higher education system in Saudi Arabia. These three axes are: comprehensive quality standards, a design model for the system framework, and the components of the model from a systemic perspective. Each of these axes has several divisions. To achieve the aim of this study, several experts from universities in and outside Saudi Arabia were consulted in order to compose the best model. The fields of expertise of the consulted professors included Educational Technologies, Teaching Methodologies, Pedagogy, Management and Planning, Psychology, Computer Sciences, IT, ICT, and Library and Information Sciences.
This study followed a systematic approach which includes detecting the issue, analyzing it, presenting a recommended solution model, developing a solution tool according to the model, and finally testing the solutions and improving the problem-solving process, all to orient the components of the system towards specific goals. This approach depends on the elements of a comprehensive system in which all relations between these elements are fully addressed. This study also used the descriptive analytical approach through the application of the tools of the study throughout a full school year (1441/1442 A.H). During that year, the questionnaires for the three axes of the study were deployed and the results and open-source responses were analyzed through 6 stages using the Delphi Method. This method is of high importance in predicting future variables and establishing policies and alternatives, all in order to create the future perceptions and tendencies. Additionally, the quality standards for the recommended model for the distance higher education system framework in Saudi Arabia were attained, and the recommended model for the distance higher education system framework was designed accordingly. There also exists a comprehensive description for the elements of the

recommended model from a systemic perspective.
The study is concluded by highlighting the importance of activating the recommended model for the distance higher education system in Saudi Arabia, as well as promoting the concept of institutional designing of distance education and discovering scientific methods in the fields of distance education and technical development.
Keywords: System, Higher Education, Framework Model, Distance Education.

Introduction:

Technology has created revolutionary advances in the methods of learning and teaching. The interactive whiteboard has long replaced traditional blackboards and two-dimensional pictures of schoolbooks. Today's learners no longer want the traditional learning methods that became ever more obsolete. They instead favor learning through technology and being in digital innovative classrooms. Due to its popularity among learners and teachers, modern technology offers spectacular opportunities to reshape education in the 21st century. These technological advances created new revolutionary education systems. Today, the adoption of distance education has become the most important form of refining and renovating the educational process in educational institutions. Due to the pivotal role of online dictation in enhancing educational institutions and the elements of the educational process, the existence of a comprehensive plan for the development of the teaching and learning processes is of utter importance. If we aim to attain satisfying educational outcomes from distance education, we must view it as a tool to address a vital need not a set of new isolated objectives. Distance education itself will not Fulfill the desired revolution in educational models. This revolution requires fundamental modifications in the way distance education is employed.

The educational system must constantly interact with the surrounding variables as it cannot work separately from its surroundings. It must also not be left behind in the global developments that are happening all over. The developments must cover everything from the philosophy and ideological inclinations of education to the content presented in classrooms. Education as a field must be in harmony with the global scientific and epistemological structures where variables are way more than constants and where the future in more of a concern than both the past and the present.

Distance education is considered an important supporting element for traditional education, and the most efficient solution to address the challenge of the technological era. Not only is it the best investment of technology, but also a strategic option that must be employed to accomplish the revolution in educational methods. Distance education is carried out using electronic mediums through which communication is established between the two parties; educators and learners. Modern communication tools, such as computers and smart devices, the internet, and multimedia, are also employed in order to achieve the intended educational goals. The success of distance education depends largely on the selection and development of distance education systems in order to address the requirements of the field. These requirements include constant updating and following the regulations and standards of the selected system in a way that ensures the improvement of the learners' abilities and helps achieve the system's goals. Distance education is tool through which the learner acquires the knowledge and skills needed to overcome the challenges they face in a life that is increasingly depending on technology and on its fluid nature.

Online education plays a vital role in improving distance education, which in turn is facing several challenges impeding reaching optimum quality. Therefore, acquiring comprehensive quality standards is crucial for the educational process so it would catch the train of technological development. This must be followed by the reconstruction of the designing model for the distance higher education system framework according to these quality standards. Speaking about the quality of distance education necessarily means speaking about the quality of the components of the distance higher education systems model from a systemic perspective.

Since the distance higher education system is still in its early days, especially in Saudi Arabia, it is important that more in-depth studies will be carried out in each aspect of this field. This study aims to fill some of the gaps in literature and help build a foundation for future research in online higher education systems. Research in the acceptance of distance online education will provide useful information especially in the early stages of developing and implementing the technologies of distance online education. The results of this study will provide the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia with more insight regarding the views of faculty members on distance higher education. This study will also pave the road for future research on the acceptance of technology in higher education particularly in Saudi Arabia.

Focus and Questions of the Study:

There is a dire need for development of the educational institutions, especially those of higher education. Additionally, the focus of the Ministry of Education is shifting towards distance education as a way to address the needs of this technological era that imposed a new reality where distance education is of utter importance.

The focus of this study is the attempt to answer its sole question: What is the framework model for distance higher education in Saudi Arabia?

This focus can be further explained in the attempt of answering the following sub-questions:

1. What are the comprehensive quality standards that are required for the recommended framework model for distance education in the universities of Saudi Arabia?
2. What is the recommended educational model for designing a framework model for the distance higher education system?
3. What is the recommended vision for the elements of the recommended model from a systemic perspective?

The Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study are:

1. Setting the comprehensive quality standards that are required for the recommended framework model for distance education in the universities of Saudi Arabia.
2. Designing the recommended framework model for distance higher education.
3. Describing the elements of the recommended model from a systemic perspective.

The Range of the Study:

This study covers:

- Creating a recommended vision for the framework of the distance higher education system from a systemic perspective, without applying it in real life.
- Creating a vision for the elements of the distance higher education framework's website.
- Relying on the views of experts from Saudi and Non-Saudi universities to construct the recommended model. The fields of expertise of the consulted faculty members include Educational Technologies, Teaching Methodologies, Pedagogy, Management and Planning, Psychology, Computer Sciences, IT, ICT, and Library and Information Sciences.

The Importance of the Study:

- Identifying the recommended framework model for distance higher education systems the in educational institutions is the starting point and not the end. It is merely an attempt to establish and a knowledge base in the field of education.
- Brining innovation into the field of education by revisioning the framework of the distance higher education system, following the desire of educators to ensure the better for the methods of education.
- Designing the recommended framework model for distance higher education which will result in the improvement of the educational process as it's considered a necessity to attain the optimum performance.
- The scarcity of studies that focus on the framework of distance higher education systems in this era of technology makes this study a great addition to Arabic literature and a catalyst for future studies to be conducted.

The Approach of the Study:

This study follows a systematic approach which includes detecting the issue, analyzing it, presenting a recommended solution model, developing a solution tool according to the model, and finally testing the solutions and improving the problem-solving process, all to orient the components of the system towards specific goals. This approach depends on the elements of a comprehensive system in which all relations between these elements are fully addressed. (Adas et. al., 2003: pages 336-337; Dwaidi, 2004: 69).

The study also used the descriptive analytical approach (Adas et. al., 2003: 247)

The Population of the Study:

The population of this study includes experts and faculty members from universities both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. The fields of expertise of the faculty members included Educational Technologies, Teaching Methodologies, Pedagogy, Management and Planning, Psychology, Computer Sciences, IT, ICT, and Library and Information Sciences. The experts' views on the current research tools were collected.

The Sample of the Study:

Due to the nature of the study that requires collecting the views of experts and faculty members in Saudi and Non-Saudi universities, purposive sampling was used in this collection. This means that the

selection was based on the expertise of the researcher and their knowledge that the chosen sample represents the population of the study. The researcher selects the sample freely on basis of the latter achieving the objectives of the conducted research (Adas et. al., 2003: 139).
The characteristics of the sample of this study are employer, specialty, and degree. Thirty-three experts have accepted to participate, and they are listed in table (1) below:

Table (1) : Characteristics of the participants from Saudi and Non-Saudi universities

NUMBER OF FACULTY MEMBERS		**SPECIALITY AND NUMBER**		**DEGREE AND NUMBER**	
Employer	**Number**	**Specialty**	**Number**	**Degree**	**Number**
Saudi universities	20	Educational Technologies	10	Professor	7
Non-Saudi Universities	13	Teaching Methodologies	7	Associate Professor	17
		Pedagogy	2	Assistant Professor	9
		Management and Planning	3		
		Psychology	1		
		Computer Sciences	5		
		IT	1		
		ICT	2		
		Library and Information Sciences	2		
Total	**33**	**Total**	**33**	**Total**	**33**

Preparation of Tools of the Study:

FIRST STEP: Constructing an appropriate educational design framework model for the distance higher education system:

After reviewing numerous instructional design models used for designing systems, the researcher constructed an instructional design model according to the current trends in instructional designs. The researcher has derived a specific instructional design model for this research according to the systemic view that she concluded in the theoretical part of the research. She did not adopt any of the already existing instructional design models for constructing a framework for the distance higher education system due to the following limitations she noticed:

- Some of the models are designed for traditional educational programs and not for distance education programs.
- The shortage in the models designed for distance higher education.
- Most of the models are consistent with individual learning styles and not both individual and collective learning styles.
- Some of the components of the models are complicated and difficult to apply.

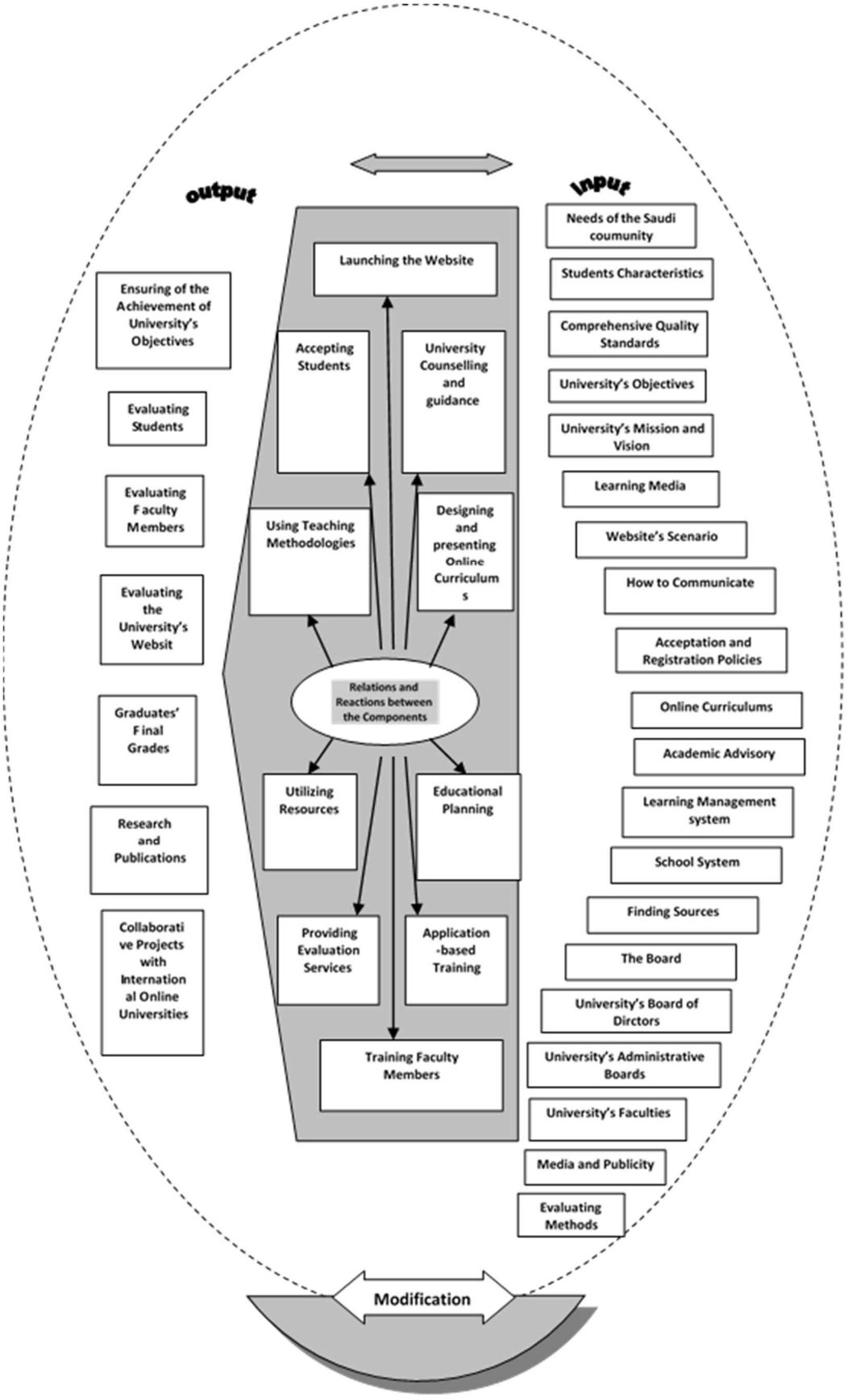
- Some of the models neglected the element of constructing an interactive learning environment as it is the foundation of constructing distance higher education.
- Some of the models described on describing specific elements such as focusing on designing and not the application and follow-up processes.
- Some of the models did not distinguish between the program calendar and the learner's calendar.
- Some of the models focused on constructing a unit or a module and not a whole program.

The recommended instructional design model for the framework of the distance higher education system was constructed from a systemic perspective. The model includes the 4 main stages of the system. Under each stage there are several sub-stages as follows:

- Inputs.
- Processes.
- Outputs.
- Feedback.

The researcher then presented her model to several experts in educational technologies and teaching methodologies in order to test the effectiveness of the model.

The experts then expressed their opinions and views that had a massive influence on modifying the contents and outline of the design model. The researcher then applied all the modifications. The final model is displayed in the results of this study. As shown in the following figure:


output
input
Needs of the Saudi coumunity
Students Characteristics
Comprehensive Quality Standards
University's Objectives
University's Mission and Vision
Learning Media
Website's Scenario
How to Communicate
Acceptation and Registration Policies
Online Curriculums
Academic Advisory
Learning Management system
School System
Finding Sources
The Board
University's Board of Dirctors
University's Administrative Boards
University's Faculties
Media and Publicity
Evaluating Methods
Launching the Website
Accepting Students
University Counselling and guidance
Using Teaching Methodologies
Designing and presenting Online Curriculums
Relations and Reactions between the Components
Utilizing Resources
Educational Planning
Providing Evaluation Services
Application -based Training
Training Faculty Members
Ensuring of the Achievement of University's Objectives
Evaluating Students
Evaluating Faculty Members
Evaluating the University's Websit
Graduates' Final Grades
Research and Publications
Collaborative Projects with International Online Universities
Modification

SECOND STEP: Preparation of a list of the elements of the distance higher education system's framework:

Preparing a list of the elements of the distance higher education system's framework goes as follows:

Constructing the list:

First, the researcher created an initial model of the list containing the components of the distance higher education system's framework. This model contains 3 main axes, under each several sentences are listed as the axis' description. The questionnaire ends with an open question to the participants to say their suggestions and add what they think is missing from the axes.

The questionnaire uses a binary scale to assess the relevance of the sentence to the axis and the also assess the correctness of the sentence linguistically. The options in this scale are relevant and irrelevant. There's an additional column for suggestions and views.

The researcher prepared an opening speech explaining to the consulted experts the subject of the study, the objectives of the questionnaire, and what they need to do with the axes she prepared. She also emphasized that they may add what they think is more relevant and write their views on the questionnaire.

1. **Sending the questionnaire containing the list of elements of the recommended module to the experts:**

The researcher sent her questionnaire to the experts through E-mail and using printed papers in the absences of the former. She also contacting the experts afterwards to confirm that they received her questionnaire, and also to answer any inquiries they have regarding the study.

2. **Analyzing the data:**

The researcher focused on examining the suggestions and notes made by the experts to utilize them in rephrasing and reconstructing the axes according to the usefulness of the suggestion and/or it being mentioned frequently by different experts.

Moreover, the researcher concentrated on examining the feedback and response section to verify the relevance of the axes and the sentences belonging to each. She also verified the grammatical and linguistic correctness of each sentence which achieves the goal of this sentence being in the questionnaire.

Sentences were added, removed, or rephrased following the repeated suggestions and notes by the consulted faculty members. Eventually, after all the modifications were applied on the questionnaire of the list of the elements of the distance higher education system's framework, the final module of the recommended model's elements was issued.

Assessing the Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire:

The reliability and validity of this questionnaire were assessed as follows:

1. Assessing the reliability:

To assess the reliability, the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha as it is the most suitable for this questionnaire as shown in tables (2) and (3) Below.

Table (2): The results of reliability assessment for each axis separately in the elements of the

recommended model

Axis	Reliability coefficient	Axis	Reliability coefficient	Axis	Reliability coefficient
1	0.91	2	0.89	3	0.89

Due to calculated reliability coefficients for all the main axes of the questionnaire being high, no axis was removed from the elements of the distance higher education system's framework.

Table (3): Results of overall reliability coefficient for the elements of the model

The Questionnaire	Number of participants	Number of Axis	Reliability Coefficient
Elements of distance higher education system's framework	33	3	0.987

From the table above we deduce that the overall reliability coefficient for the main axes is high (0.98).

2. Assessing the validity:

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was also assessed through the calculation of correlation coefficients of each main axis compared to the overall of the questionnaire. The results of this process are shown in table (4) below.

Table (4): Results of internal consistency assessment for each axis and the overall coefficient of the questionnaire

Axis	correlation coefficients	Axis	correlation coefficients	Axis	correlation coefficients
1	0.89	2	0.80	3	0.79

Following the results in table (4), no main axis was removed as all the correlation coefficients between the main axis and the overall coefficient of the questionnaire were statistical functions at 0.05.

Display and Discussion of the Results of the Research:

1. Answering the first question:

The first question of this study is:" What are the comprehensive quality standards that are required for the recommended framework model for distance education in the universities of Saudi Arabia? ". To answer this question, a list of all the comprehensive quality standards was prepared. These standards are:

- Standards of the objectives of the distance higher education system.
- Standards of the administrative system.
- Standards of the curriculums.
- Standards of the educational media.
- Standards of the learning system.
- Standards of the design of the distance higher education system's website.
- Standards of the faculty members.
- Standards of the evaluation methods.

- Standards of media and advertisement.
- Standards of the effectiveness of the distance higher education system.
- Standards of funding for the distance higher education system.

This list of standards was approved by all the consulted faculty members.

Consequently, the list of comprehensive quality standards that are required for distance higher education was constructed and all the modifications were conducted based on the views and suggestions of the consulted experts. The list consists of 11 points each of which is a main standard of the comprehensive quality standards that are required for distance higher education. Following each main standard there is a list of sub-standards as follows:

The Comprehensive Quality Standards Required for the Recommended Framework Model for Distance Education in the Universities of Saudi Arabia

FIRST: The General Objectives: The general objectives of distance higher education is consistent with:

1- The needs of society.
2- The nature of the online curriculums.
3- The nature of the students.
4- The modern global trends that international online universities follow.
5- The technologies used in online education.

SECOND: The private behavioral objectives of distance higher education:

1- Must be flexible and allow new modifications.
2- Must use an easy and accurate language that is easy to assess.
3- Must stem from the educational needs of students.
4- Must be assessable through educational programs and plans.
5- Must take into consideration the previous expertise of students.
6- Must guarantee high levels of cognitive awareness (improve critical thinking, improve innovative thinking, etc.)
7- Must be consistent with one another.

2. The Administrative System:

1- The existence of an administrative structure that addresses all the needs and present and future burdens of administrative work.
2- The existence of a cooperative, attentive, and qualified council for distance higher education in order to achieve the anticipated objectives.
3- The existence of seasoned administrators in this field.
4- Organizing diverse training program to improve the efficiency and skills of the employees in the administrative system.
5- Defining the job titles, tasks, and description of each division to avoid overlapping and confusion.

6- Organizing regular meeting where employees share their problems and suggestions.
7- Orienting the new-coming students with the entire system beforehand.
8- Ensuring the confidentiality of students records and information.
9- Announcing the policies of the distance higher education clearly.
10- The existence of terms and regulations for all processes.

3. Online Curriculums:

1- The online curriculums must be consistent with the general and private objectives of distance higher education.
2- The objectives of the online curriculum must be defined.
3- The online curriculums must be designed according to the needs of the students.
4- The method of interaction must be determined.
5- There must be balance between general and specialty curriculums.
6- The requirements of the curriculum must be mentioned (Computer skills, technical skills, etc.).
7- The elements of the online curriculum must be defined.
8- Information must be organized according to the hypermedia form.
9- The online curriculum must improve the skills and knowledge of the students.
10- The online curriculums must meet the standards of SCORM standards:
- Analyzing the online curriculum (Viewing the content, researching the receivers, determining the capabilities of the environment, determining the objectives).
- Designing the online curriculum (Designing the planning content: determining the objectives, collecting resources and determining the teaching methods, determining the flow and order of the curriculum, determining the evaluation method).
- Developing the online curriculum (Creating content according to what was determined in the previous step: collecting and producing pictures, videos, interactive exercises, and individual exercises then bundling the collected content).
- Applying the online curriculum (Connecting the content to the learning administrative system, training faculty on using the system).
- Evaluating the online curriculum (Evaluating the efficiency and quality of the curriculum in two stages: Constructive and statistical).
11- Constructing the curriculums must meet the various international standards.
12- Dividing the content into small educational objectives that include:
- Dividing the content of classes into small educational objectives called educational objects.
- Each educational object has specific educational objectives, is not connected to any other educational objects, and cannot be divided into other educational objects.
- Each educational object consists of three overlapping parts: learning, application, and self-evaluation.
- Preparing the content (Converting word files into HTML, after that each file is numbered to the same number it had as a word file then is saved in the curriculum's HTML folder).
- Bundling the content using Reload Editor which is placing all the resources required for sharing the curriculum into one compressed folder. This folder does not only contain the curriculum

files but also files in XML that contain everything regarding the curriculum such as the index, order of contents, etc.

- Installing the content bundle on the learning management system. The bundle is then imported using the "import" feature.

13- The existence of a clear and explicit educational philosophy such as adopting a specific learning theory when constructing the content.
14- The capability of material resources to fully meet the requirements of the online program.
15- The language (Arabic/English) must be clear and correct.
16- Updating the curriculum regularly by education experts.
17- The writing style of the educational units must meet the scientific, technical, and educational standards.
18- Carrying out an initial check.
19- Sending the curriculum for evaluation.
20- Currying out a final check.
21- Analyzing the students' feedback and making modifications on the curriculum accordingly to improve the scientific material.
22- Organizing the time periods in which the classes are broadcasted.
23- Ensuring the validity of the online curriculum.
24- There must be receivers for the broadcasted curriculum.

4. Learning Media:

1- The learning media must be compatible with the objectives of the educational program for these objectives to be efficiently achieved.
2- The learning media must be compatible with the educational content.
3- The learning media must be characterized by diversity, comprehensiveness, the ability to easily deliver the educational material to the students, and the ability to provide easy feedback.
4- The features of the learning media must be identified beforehand in order for them to be used in the best possible way.
5- The students must be provided with the basic skills of using the online learning media.
6- The learning media must be evaluated regularly.

5. The School System:

1- Allowing the students an extent of independence regarding the time, attendance, and place of classes.
2- Defining the learning style (integrative, synchronous, and asynchronous learning).
3- Creating a list of reference books for each class for students to study from.
4- Identifying the prerequisites for the students of the online programs.
5- Analyzing the category of the students that are to be accepted.
6- Determining the number of certified hours appropriate for the level of the program.
7- Providing the students with a study guide to clarify the educational units.
8- Providing the students with a study guide to familiarize them with the questions of the tests

and their solutions. This guide can also be used as a guide for learning skill.

9- Organizing discussion groups and mailing lists to facilitate contact between students and academic advisors.

10- Providing a schedule to assess the progress of the curriculum.

6. Designing the website for the distance higher education system:

1- The ages of the students must be taken into account.

2- Every page must be connected to the homepage using one of the various connecting systems (Sequences, networks, hierarchy, etc.)

3- The homepage must include introductory pictures and content tables.

4- Navigation, redirecting, and searching strategies must be organized.

5- The website must be clear and balanced regarding colors, fonts, pictures, connections, media.

6- Technical support must be available for the website.

7- A page for similar websites and collaborative resources must be available.

8- The website must contain contrast between its various elements to ensure clarity.

9- Information within the website must be organized in a way that facilitates preparing and viewing this information.

10- Information within the website must be connected in a logical way that facilitates retrieving the information.

11- The website must be easy to use, navigate, and search within.

12- The building format of the interactive hypermedia in the website must be clear.

13- Students must have control on the interactive learning exercises.

14- The styles of content display on the website must be determined.

15- The website must include learning evaluation and improvement.

16- Sound must be used as reinforcement for the scientific material not as the only carrier.

17- Animation must be used to draw attention, clarify, and reinforce the curriculum.

18- Videos must be used to facilitate teaching and learning.

19- Video conferences and meetings must be used to reinforce the learning process.

7. Faculty Members:

1- A sufficient number of qualified faculty members for online education must be present.

2- Digital guides for faculty members must be available to explain the policies, election processes, and selection of faculty members, their responsibilities, as well as their evaluation and compensation if needed.

3- A digital file for each faculty member containing all the information about their qualifications, schedule, address, etc. must be available.

4- A sufficient number of assistants and helping staff must be provided.

5- There must qualified staff for designing the online curriculums.

6- Regular training programs for professional development must be provided for the faculty members and their assistants.

7- Students must be encouraged by the faculty members to pursue self-learning and practice

teamwork, and their feedback must be followed.

8. Evaluation Methods:

1- A full exam guide displaying grades must be available.
2- The exam questions must be consistent with the objectives of the curriculum units.
3- The exam questions must be prepared by a special board consisting of the academic supervisors of the online curriculum and experts in the specific subject.
4- The exams must include instructions to help students solve the questions efficiently and successfully.
5- The exams must contain questions to evaluate various skills such as knowledge, understanding, comprehension, applying, analyzing, and constructing.
6- The questions of the exam must be clear and accurate.
7- The number of the questions must be proportionate to their objective.
8- The evaluating questions must be diverse and gradual and take into account the individual differences of the students.
9- The educational materials must be constantly evaluated in order to be improved and refined.
10- The costs and revenue of the online education programs must be evaluated.
11- Various evaluating methods must be used for online education. This includes:
- Discussions.
- Assignments and homework.
- Preparing reports after analyzing topics.
- Carrying out projects.

9. Media and Publicity:

1- Media and publicity must be fact-based.
2- The material of media must be clear and objective.
3- Media employees must be qualified to carry out their campaigns.
4- Media and publicity policies must be meticulous so that the students can finalize their educational choices.
5- A digital guide must be presented for students upon registration. This guide includes student's rights and duties, educational plans for each major, tuition fees, payment methods, etc.

10. Effectiveness of the Distance Higher Education System:

1- The objectives of the distance higher education system must be compatible with its mission.
2- The objectives of the educational programs must be compatible with the objectives and mission of the distance education system.
3- The objectives of the educational programs must be met.
4- The administrative system must be effective.
5- Students must be effective.
6- Faculty members must be effective.
7- Educational calendars must be effective.

8- Learning media must be effective in achieving the desired educational outcomes.
9- The media and publicity system must be effective.
10- Formative, summative, and diagnostic evaluation must be carried out and the results must be used to ensure the effectiveness of the education.
11- There must be a digital library providing students with educational services.
12- There must be a unit in the distance higher education system for evaluation and quality control.
13- There must be a database in the distance higher education system.

11. Funding Sources for the Distance Higher Education System:

1- Ensuring that financial objectives do not overshadow the educational objectives.
2- There must be a scheme for securing the financial sources necessary for the stability of the educational institution.
3- There must be a scheme for controlling purchases, stocks, and expenditures.
4- There must be a scheme for side investments that aid the institution financially.
5- There must be a scheme for annually auditing the distance higher education system.

Answering the second question:

The second question of this study is "What is the recommended educational model for designing a framework model for the distance higher education system?". To answer this question a systemic educational model was constructed. The model contains the following four stages:

- Inputs.
- Processes.
- Outputs.
- Feedback.

Figure (2) displays the designing educational model suitable for designing a recommended framework model for the distance higher education system in its final form. The figure is a concept map showing the main sections and the sub-sections of the digital system.

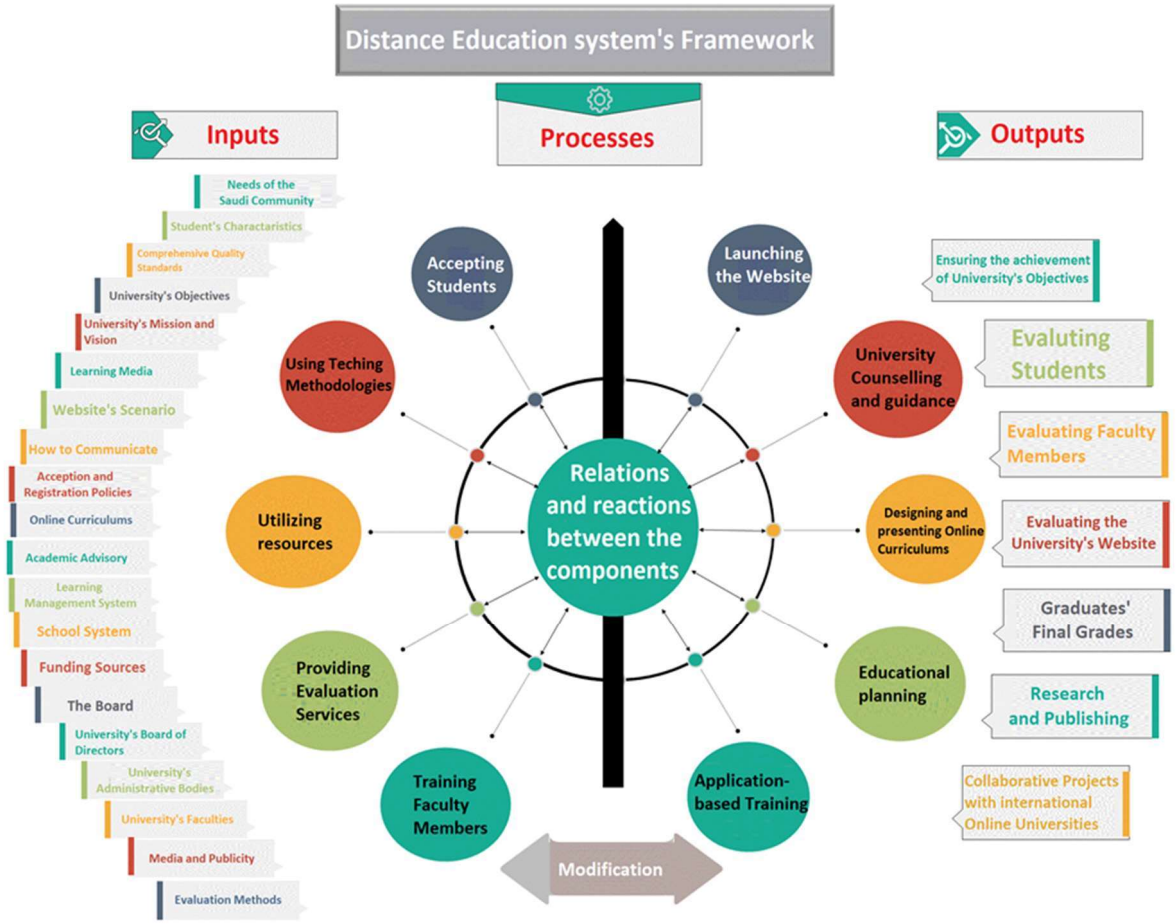


Figure (2): A model for the recommended distance higher education system's framework according to the system.

Answering the third question:

The third question of this study is "What is the recommended vision for the elements of the recommended model from a systemic perspective?". To answer this question a list of the components of the distance higher education system's framework was constructed. This list was approved by all the faculty members that it was shown to. The details of the recommended model are shown below:

The Concept of Distance Higher Education

Nowadays, higher education is considered one of the most important displays of development in societies. It is now more like a fact that for a society to become civilized and sophisticated, it must invest in its human resources. Higher education is one of the most obvious forms of that investment. Higher education aims to prepare qualified staff to address the needs of development programs. This is what higher education institutions are striving to achieve through the academic programs in the various majors. Moreover, these programs are being modified and improved constantly to keep up with the constant evolvement of science and philosophy and the changes in the needs of human societies. Higher education plays a vital role in encouraging innovation which is the main tool used to solve the problems and hurdles that face our humankind, all through scientific research to find

solutions for these problems. Moreover, Higher education has direct and indirect effects on a nation's economic development as it provides human resources that the market needs.

The challenges and hurdles facing the sector of higher education are of similar size to its importance and age back to its beginnings. These challenges are very clear in this era of information explosion and scientific revolution. The increasing use of machines resulting in changes in the market, the fast spread of democracy, and the increasing human ambition and striving to obtain basic human rights such as education, especially higher educations, all these factors led to unprecedented numbers of higher education students which resulted in paralyzing the system. Ultimately, the system had to change its traditional ways and methods to be able to provide services to these increasing numbers.

This led officials and educators all over the world to conduct research and studies and organize conferences and meetings to help them identify the problems facing higher education. Identifying these problems is the first step into solving followed by suggesting solutions and improving the quality of higher education. This highlighted the need to reconstruct higher education institutions according to the modern trends in the field (distance education and online education).

Higher education is of immense importance in Saudi society. It is believed that it promotes several aspects such as the ultimate belief in God, community service, and enhancing ideologies. Moreover, it plays an important role in the field of scientific research which is the primary contributor to global development and finding solutions for the challenges of this era such as technical challenges and the needs of the labor market. In Saudi Arabia, higher education is a great contributor to the community and the national economy through creating qualified human resources and improving their quality and efficiency.

The challenges of today's life have undoubtedly affected the sector of higher education in Saudi Arabia as well. Consequently, the sector today suffers from several crises that are drastically affecting the efficiency and quality of education. These crises include increasing numbers of students, shortage of faculty members, the remote locations of some universities, increasing spending on higher education without tangible educational outcomes, and the inability to achieve optimum quality in the educational outcome due to the universities' interest in quantity over quality. This last problem led to shortages in the capabilities, equipment, and laboratories needed to train the higher education students. This ultimately led to the universities' inability to keep up with the global technological advances and development.

The challenges facing higher education in Saudi Arabia also include the increase in demand and registration rates. This demand is expected to increase further in the future due to demographic, economic, social, and institutional factors. Therefore, the absorptive capacity of the higher education sector must be expanded while simultaneously ensuring that the quality and efficiency of education are not negatively affected. Technology must be imported into Saudi Arabia, and the cultural and scientific relations of the country with the world's educationally developed countries should be strengthened to facilitate the exchange of expertise between the nations.

Radical reconstruction and the utilization of revolutionary alternatives are key solutions to overcome the challenges and changes that are facing traditional higher education. The first of these revolutionary alternatives is distance education which contributes significantly to satisfying the increasing demand through serving those who wish to continue their higher education or wish to enroll in later stages of

their lives while having full-time jobs.

Based on the foregoing, and due to the importance of finding alternatives and great solutions to these increasing challenges, the higher education sector is planning to employ a distance education system that is designed according to comprehensive quality standards. This distance education system is expected to be accessible by all members of the community regardless of geographical, political, social, cultural, and economic circumstances. Thus, it will achieve all the objectives of higher education and the educational policies in Saudi Arabia, and those of the students, their families, and the community.

The Mission of the Distance Higher Education System

The belief that knowledge is the building block of humanity and civilization is the backbone of our educational philosophy and ideology, especially that of higher education. Knowledge is essential for the life of everyone who is aware of what this age requires, and aware of their ambitions. Science is never complete with innovative thinking, practical application, and constant use of time to reach more scientific conclusions and discoveries. These are all fruits of self-learning and the burning desire to research. Self-learning is the backbone of learning that leads man to pursue more of it from modern open universities and their careers and workplaces. This was made possible by the ongoing revolution in communication and information. Today, the internet has made the new universities more dynamic, more democratic in their learning processes, and more capable of improving their academic missions, leading them to become excellent academic monuments in the field of distance higher education.

The mission and vision of the distance higher education system can be summarized in the following points:

1. Applying the philosophy of online education according to the latest technological and scientific discoveries.
2. Providing scientific degrees in the fields that are needed in the Saudi and Arab communities.
3. Providing online higher education services to the students.
4. Creating an online environment that encourages freedom of thought and speech.
5. Providing academic programs and majors that address the requirements of development, the needs of the community, and the vision of 2030.
6. Developing content and styles of online curriculums that encourage online learning.
7. Adding new majors and programs as the need arises.
8. Hiring qualified and well-trained faculty members.
9. Applying the latest techniques offered by information and communications technology.
10. Applying the concepts of comprehensive quality in higher education and providing the qualified staff, funding, and training needed for it.
11. Encouraging research, studies, creativity, and productivity.
12. The collaboration of the distance higher education system with other local and international educational and social institutions.

The Objectives of the Distance Higher Education System

The objectives mentioned below are derived from the vision and mission of the distance higher education system. These objectives were drafted as follows:

1. Ensuring adherence to the philosophy that the system was based on, which is the application of online education according to the latest technological and scientific discoveries.
2. Encouraging academic freedom and the freedom of thought and speech as long as it is moral and does not disrespect others.
3. Reinforcing the interest in the quality of performance on all levels according to the comprehensive quality scheme.
4. Developing the female working population that the Saudi community needs to keep up with the need for qualified workers and the increasing changes in the labor market.
5. Delivering qualified graduates that are skillful and knowledgeable enough to continue their journey through self-learning.
6. Providing higher education that is available for everyone who wishes to enroll regardless of their location and include the highest number possible of students.
7. Guiding students to the necessity of both knowledge and application for them to serve their communities.
8. Allowing students to pursue their studies while keeping their jobs which increases individual productivity and saves human and material resources.
9. Utilizing the unexploited expertise in various majors through the academic programs provided through distance higher education.
10. Saving time and using it more efficiently by using modern means of communication.
11. Providing online educational programs that connect science with practical life in Saudi Arabia.

The Administrative structure of the Distance Higher Education System

- The Board (Board of Trustees):

1. The Board of Trustees consists of elite academic and scientific personalities that are qualified and interested in the objectives of the distance higher education system. It also includes elected student representatives.
2. The membership in the board is limited to between 2-4 years. In case of vacancy of a position, the board elects a member who is qualified and interested in the objectives of the distance higher education system.
3. The Board of Trustees' responsibilities are:

- General oversight of the distance higher education system.
- Ensuring that the objectives are fulfilled.
- Electing the president of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of the university.

- **The Board of Directors of the distance higher education system:**

1. Consists of the director, secretary of legal affairs, secretary of financial and administrative affairs, secretary of academic affairs (the immediate supervisory agency of quality control), a trustee member, and a representative of the Ministry of Higher Education.
2. The membership in this board is limited to 4 years and in case of vacancy of a position, the

Board of Trustees democratically elects a member that is qualified and interested in the objectives of the distance higher education system.

3. The Board of Directors' responsibilities are:

- Creating the general policy of the distance higher education system in a way that Fulfills the stipulated objectives of the system.
- Supervising the educational processes and the staff of the distance higher education system according to the regulations.
- Evaluating the educational processes in the distance higher education system according to the feedback.
- Certification of the academic programs and determining the major and degrees assigned to each.
- Exchanging of expertise and local, national, and international collaboration with authorities that are specialized and interested in the objectives of the distance higher education system. This shall be achieved through the endorsement of the collaboration agreements between these authorities and the distance higher education system.
- Issuing and modifying regulations for the following: Acceptance and Registration – Exams and Evaluation – Personnel Matters – Student Exchange – Financial and Administrative Affairs. The board can issue regulations in other matters as the need arises.
- Verifying the general plans intended to provide resources to Fulfill the objectives of the distance higher education system.
- Developing the resources of the distance higher education system and carrying out investment.
- Improving and updating the performance of the distance higher education system.
- Resolving the issues referred to the board by the Board of the Trustees or the President of the Board.
- Appointing the director and the secretaries and assigning their responsibilities.
- Constructing the administrative structure of the distance higher education system.

- Student acceptance policy in the distance higher education system:

1. Students from all around Saudi Arabia and the world must be accepted without discrimination.
2. Students must have achieved a GPA of 60% or more to be accepted.
3. Students must pass the technical qualification test that assesses their ability to succeed academically.
4. Students must have obtained the ICDL to be accepted.

The Administrations of the University:

The Administration of Writing, Translation, Research, Publication, and Copyrights

The Administration of Acceptance, Registration, and Public Affairs. This includes four divisions:

- Acceptance
- Registration

- Financial Affairs and Accounting
- Students Affairs

Administration of Information Technology. This includes four divisions:

- Network Management
- Systems Analysis
- Online Curriculum Development
- Technical Services and Support

Administration of Quality Control and Media. This includes two divisions:

- Quality Control
- Educational Media and Public Affairs

How to Register in the Distance Higher Education System

1. Students must log in to the distance higher education system's website and fill in all the required information in the registration form.
2. The registration form must be submitted (By clicking on "Submit").
3. The server then receives the registration form and automatically forwards it to the distance higher education system's Email.
4. The registration form is received by the registration team of the administration, then it is examined and the presence of all the required information is confirmed.
5. After the information is confirmed complete and correct, the student receives a message from the registration office confirming the arrival of the registration form and requesting the rest of the student's documents and certificates.
6. If the student meets all the acceptance requirements, their name appears among the final list of accepted students on the page of the specific faculty.
7. A student's Email is then created in the server of the distance higher education system and the student receives their username and password.

How to Contact the Academic Advisors – The school System – The Evaluation Methods
How to Contact the Academic Advisor:

1. The system assigns an academic advisor for each student. The student can contact their advisor through one of the following:

- Email.
- Internet Meeting.
- Chatting.
- File Transmission Protocol FTP.
- Phone calls through computers.

2. The academic advisor sends a message to the student explaining how to choose their schedule and classes and how to register in the latter.

The School System:

1. The students can freely plan and allocate the time they need to complete their studies and certified hours and get their degree according to their individual needs and preferences in a specified amount of time starting from the registration. They can also shorten this amount of time according to their learning abilities and efforts.
2. The students choose the faculty and specialty they wish to study. The educational plan of each specialty/major consists of:

- Basic compulsory courses.
- Basic courses for each major. Credit hours may vary according to the major.
- Specialty courses of which credit hours may vary according to the major.
- Elective courses.

3. Each semester must have a minimum of 3 courses and a maximum of 8 courses.
4. Removing – Adding – withdrawal of courses: Students can add or remove courses by filling a specific form on the course's webpage and send it to the distance higher education system within two weeks from the semester's starting date. Students can postpone a course they're registered in before the exams. Registration for the semester ends one month before the exams.
5. Failing and repeating: If a student fails in a course, they get two retakes of the exam.
6. Every course has a webpage in the distance higher education system. Students must visit this page to view the content they need to study. They can also contact their professors through synchronous and asynchronous methods.
7. The webpage of the course contains a list of reference books and digital educational sources.
8. The webpage of the course contains a guide that orients the students with the exams and their solutions.
9. The webpage of the course contains discussion groups and mailing lists that facilitate communication between students and their professors to allow them to interact synchronously and asynchronously.
10. The webpage of the course contains a schedule that shows the steps and weekly progress in the course.
11. The webpage of the course contains the website's technical support.

Evaluation Methods:

12. Upon the completion of the course, the professors must provide the students with instructions on the evaluation methods for the course.
13. The evaluation methods must include all or some of the following:

- Online exams to assess knowledge, understanding, comprehension, application, analysis, and construction.
- Participating in discussions through the discussion groups.
- Doing homework and assignments, preparing reports after analyzing specific topics, or doing

projects.

Characteristics of Ideal Students

1. Students must be passionate about their fields of study and able to research and self-learn.
2. Students must be able to read, write, and speak both Arabic and English (for Arab students) or only English (for Non-Arab students).
3. Students must be skillful in using computers, the internet, and modern means of communication in their learning process.
4. Students must be able to understand and comprehend the courses' notes, lectures, and classes presented by the distance higher education through the internet and the various modern means of communication.
5. Students must be innovative and passionate about learning, exploring, and utilizing the new scientific facts.

Conclusion of the Study:

Throughout the previous readings, we viewed that the recommended vision for the framework model of the distance higher education system in Saudi Arabia has three main axes: comprehensive quality standards - a design model for the system framework - the components of the model from a systemic perspective. This recommended vision will ensure the quality of distance education in the educational institutions which is one of the most important educational theses that educators in this era aspire to. This will result in teaching and learning processes becoming based on several concepts that are consistent with the philosophy of this age. These concepts are continuous education and knowledge-based education.

One of the biggest goals of educational institutions is the development of an educational system that is of premium quality and connected to the technological revolution and online education systems.

Educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, can benefit from the results of this study as it confirms the importance of activating the recommended framework model for distance higher education in Saudi universities. Furthermore, the concept of distance education must be reinforced, and new scientific methods in distance education and technological advances must be discovered.

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