



Practical Guide

For the Quality of Distance Learning Programs

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Preface

The Association of Arab Universities recently sought to focus on helping the member Arab universities to face the emergency conditions that the COVID-19 pandemic imposed on the world, which also disrupted the normal study of students in Arab and other international universities and led the Arab and international educational institutions to switch to distance learning as a substitute for the traditional education that was obstructed by the global health crisis.

In light of the increasing global trend towards this type of education, it has become necessary to identify its requirements, whether in terms of the curricula or the mechanisms that should be utilized for conducting and controlling examinations, in addition to providing the necessary means of communication and electronic devices, and other basic requirements for faculty members and students at the same time.

Based on that, the General Secretariat of the Association of Arab Universities, represented by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, prepared a practical guide for distance learning standards that includes all the necessary criteria to ensure the success of this type of education. This guide has been prepared to be a reference within the reach of academic institutions and all those who are concerned with this matter so that these institutions can carry out self-evaluation using standard practical and scientific procedures. In addition, it enables them to employ distance learning in an exemplary and safe manner while ensuring the integrity and transparency of the educational process in our Arab universities.

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Practical Guide for the Quality of Distance Learning Programs



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The objectives of the guide

This guide aims to shed light on the quality standards used in adopting distance learning in an attempt to adopt the best practices that are applied in some leading countries in the fields of distance learning, down to a unified Arab framework project for quality assurance standards in higher education institutions that introduce distance learning programs. The guide provides basic practical measures to ensure the quality of distance learning, and it is a brief quality guide for the use of distance learning technology, especially in times of crisis

Benefits of Distance Learning

Proven experiences and practical practices have shown that distance learning provides quality education in all stages of school, university and continuing education. . It is also provides a practical means of education in remote areas that do not have the basics of classroom and lecture rooms learning, layout and helps to sustain learning in times of crisis, whether caused by war or pandemics and epidemics such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some countries in the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic have faced some challenges in applying distance learning with different intensity from one country to another according to their technical and informational



capabilities, such as weak teacher training, weak educational technological system, internet services and the necessary maintenance for the available resources of each country especially the use of modern computer technologies, which are due to physical and human constraints. Despite these challenges and obstacles, distance learning spread in its various forms in many countries and spread among various groups of society of all levels, and People started to accept this type of learning for several reasons, the most important of which are:

- 1- Convenience and flexibility in scheduling study times and locations
- 2- The possibility of reaching a large number of students of geographically distant societies.
- 3- The speed and flexibility of courses development and updating processes and immediate access to the latest improvements made to them
- 4- Reduces the financial costs incurred by students and saving the time and cost of travelling to join the university
- 5- High quality, richness and diversity of educational materials in all their forms
- 6- Achieving the universal principle in offering educational materials and assuring their quality standards to reach Open Educational Resources (OER).
- 7- Moving away from indoctrination in teaching and developing self-learning skills for students and strengthening the teacher's role as a mentor and advisor



- 8- An appropriate solution to the problem of education in times of crisis and Forced closure of educational institutions
- 9- Solves the problem of the scarcity of teachers in some disciplines.

The Concept of Quality in Distance Learning

The concept of quality in education in general falls within six main domains;

1. Quality means achieving goals; Means that a high-quality higher education institution sets specific goals and achieves them well.
2. Quality of inputs and processes; The achievement of the goals depends on many factors, the most important of which is the quality of physical and human inputs used and a set of methods and processes used to invest these inputs.
3. Standardized benchmarking quality means that the quality becomes standardized, and the performance is evaluated as excellent, good, or bad according to specific benchmarks and indicators
4. Quality versus quantity: Good quality education is the one that achieves a balance between quantity and quality.
5. Technocratic Quality: The application of scientific method with regard to scientific and technical

knowledge to enable the educational system to meet the technological and economic needs of society.

6. The three dimensional quality: it is a composite assortment of three sub-types;
 - Quality of Design; It specifies the specifications and characteristics that must be taken into consideration in all planning and implementation phases
 - Quality of performance: it is doing the work according to certain specified standards
 - Quality of Output: It is obtaining an educational product and educational services according to the expected characteristics and specifications set for the educational output and in line with the needs of the labor market.

Looking at the concept of quality in distance learning, many researchers see that the most appropriate definition is: Designing and implementing a system that includes policies and procedures to ensure that the requirements of quality and quality control are met in all functions of the distance learning institution as a whole.

Many of the quality assurance policies in higher education institutions that offer distance learning programs are built on several domains, the most important of which is;

1. Designing the educational learning and teaching environment at the institution to ensure that it achieves the approved quality standards. These include learning



resources, services available to students, administrative staff, and human and technological needs.

2. Measuring the online educational outputs and comparing them with the outputs of traditional face to face education, where distance learning institutions are required to conduct comparative studies between the performance of samples of distance learning students and that of a similar sample of students in traditional education. In addition, the institutions also conduct competency examinations for selected samples of enrolled students and graduates.
3. Comparing the success rates of students of distance learning programs in the professional examinations conducted by stakeholders such as unions, professional unions and employers.
4. Internal (self) evaluation, which is a set of internal procedures and processes that the distance learning institution undertakes to achieve quality in its programs. These include surveys of students 'and employers' opinions, evaluation of graduates, and quality control mechanisms in study plans in terms of level, subtraction, examinations, etc
5. The external evaluation that is conducted by an external specialized professional committee that examines the components of the distance learning program in all its aspects. Taking into consideration the elements of quality, as this evaluation is considered one of the most

important processes that guarantee quality in distance education. This evaluation may be voluntary at the request of the distance learning institution or compulsory by governments represented by ministries of higher education or governmental academic accreditation bodies overseeing higher education institutions in that country.

6. Academic and professional accreditations. It is required that the distance learning institution obtains the necessary accreditations for its programs from the local and international councils, organizations, and bodies that are concerned with setting standards that the distance learning institution should achieve them in order to be accredited. Accreditation is defined as a set of procedures that an external agency undertakes to ensure that the distance learning institution meets the minimum quality standards related to academic, administrative, and support services.
7. Procedures for continuous improvement in quality assurance which shows the seriousness of the distance learning institution in adopting best practices in distance learning and that the objectives of the institution include a clear goal to ensure the basic quality assurance elements represented in achieving the following;
 - The students and their parents are satisfied with the distance learning programs and this satisfaction is in



line with achieving the professional and academic standards of the programs.

- Continuous improvement and upgrading of teaching, learning and technological services and the academic level of graduates and their performance.
- Efficiency and perfection in providing educational services
- Continuous monitoring by the educational institution higher management that adopts practical measures to ensure the achievement of the institution's goals.



The Basic Components of Distance Learning Quality

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1-Designing and developing the scientific material:

There is a set of qualitative indicators of quality adopted in the design and development of study materials for distance learning programs.

Table - 1
Indicator for the approved quality in the design and development of study materials for distance learning programs

No.	Indicator	Rating (1– 10)*	Comments
1	Clarity of educational objectives and the content of the course material, and its updating to be compatible with modern scientific developments		
2	Clear learning outcomes at the program level as well as at the level of each unit of study and link the outcomes of the academic units with the outcomes of the program as a whole, in a clear and consistent manner		
3	Learning and teaching methods and media used in remote teaching and delivering of distance learning courses		

4	The amount and percentage of interaction and dialogue in the course material		
5	The ability to review, develop and update the contents of the course material, with this being documented in a file for each course		
6	Accessibility to open course content based on the outputs		
7	Is there a periodic review of the program		
8	The clarity of evaluation and examination methods and their linkage with the required learning outcomes, and the existence of an effective mechanisms to monitor exams and prevent cheating and fraud		

* rating = 1-4 weak, 5-6 average, 7-8 good, 9-10 excellent

2- Providing: The appropriate technological infrastructure to deliver the programs using modern reputable educational systems and strategies that are widely used on a global scale in order to achieve the goals.

Table-2- Indicators for providing the appropriate technological infrastructure to deliver the study materials for distance learning programs

No.	Indicator	Rating (1– 10)*	Comments
1	Providing a special center for information technology and data processing for distance learning		
2	Effectiveness and efficiency of the technological infrastructure required for the distance learning system Including simulation systems and modern means of communication that allow direct and indirect dialogue between students and professors and facilitate students' connection to the learning resources.		

3	Maintenance availability; Provide the necessary maintenance and technical support for the technological infrastructure and update it periodically, including the maintenance of the learning management system		
4	Provides educational materials for students at convenient times and appropriate to the utilized teaching and learning methods and the nature of the teaching material being taught		
5	The educational materials have sufficient instructions that enable the student to make the best use of them with high efficiency and quality		
6	The distance learning system guarantees the ultimate protection of user privacy through the best technological standards		

7	Existence of specific and clear policies and methods, with indications of responsibilities, to ensure the quality of teaching materials and their delivery methods and their ease of use by students and teachers		
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3- Student services and support

Table-3- Indicators for student services and support

No.	Indicator	Rating (1– 10)*	Comments
1	Services provided to students before joining the program. It includes the academic requirements, equipment and techniques required to succeed in the courses and the possibility of training the students on the study materials when required		
2	Services provided to the student during his study Such as inquiry services, dialogue, e-books, courses, assessment methods, examinations, All the necessary assistance for the student to successfully complete the courses		

3	Services provided to the student after completing the prescribed course. It includes information on exams results, absence, dropout policies, financial aid and more		
4	Providing training for learners on the techniques used in distance learning courses and provide students with learning opportunities that suit their needs and circumstances		
5	Continuous evaluation of the services provided to students through student satisfaction questionnaires and taking students 'opinions into consideration when developing the various student services especially the technical services provided to them to conduct the learning and distance learning processes well		

4- Quality of faculty members

Table-4
Indicators for the quality of faculty members

No.	Indicator	Rating (1– 10)*	Comments
1.	Ability to utilize and able to employ distance education strategies and being aware of the various educational means, digital programs and methods of delivering academic material and interacting with students		
2	Adequate and continuous training in the field of using technology and various means of communication and increase its effectiveness to help develop and acquire best educational practices		

3	Average results of performance evaluation questionnaires for faculty members conducted by colleges , faculties and quality assurance centers		
4	The percentage of PhD holders of the faculty members		
5	Percentage of part-time faculty members		
6	Average teaching load per faculty member		
7	Provide the necessary assistance and information related to teaching the course, areas of development, amendments, results of course evaluation and students' opinions		

5- Evaluating the effectiveness of the educational learning and teaching process

Table-5
Indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of the learning and teaching processes

No.	Indicator	Rating (1– 10)*	Comment
1	Average student satisfaction with the program as measured by students surveys questionnaires		
2	Average instructors satisfaction as measured by instructors surveys questionnaires		
3	Average number and percentage of students whom successfully passing the course		
4	Average number of students using the library and the learning resources		
5	Average grades of students in the Proficiency exam and aptitude tests		
6	The extent to which the program outcomes achieve their objectives		

7	Existence of specific and clear methods with declared statement of responsibilities to ensure the quality of methods used in delivering the course materials with good and effective management of the communication tools used to deliver the study materials and ensuring that they are easily used by students and instructors		
8	Average results of the periodic evaluation review of the program outcomes		
9	Evaluating the distance learning programs offered by the university by analyzing accumulated data and identify and maintain strengths, and address and avoid weaknesses		

