

Reimagining Higher Health Education: Governance Model for Virtual Universities

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the development of a conceptual framework for virtual universities within higher health education. The research aims to identify key components of an effective virtual university, analyze existing models, and develop a comprehensive framework. The study was conducted in stages. A systematic review using the BEHEMOTH methodology identified 13 existing virtual university models and extracted themes. Qualitative interviews with 7 experts identified additional topics. The results from the systematic review and interviews were synthesized to identify the basic elements and their relationships in a virtual university governance model. Key themes reflecting major aspects of virtual universities were organized. Finally, a framework consisting of 5 main subsystems was proposed: strategic planning, educational pedagogy, intelligent technologies, central support services, and contextual factors. Implementing this framework is expected to significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of virtual universities by adopting a more interactive approach. It provides guidance for developing virtual offerings and remaining relevant in the digital age.

Keywords: Distance Education, E-Learning, Virtual, BEHEMOTH Methodology

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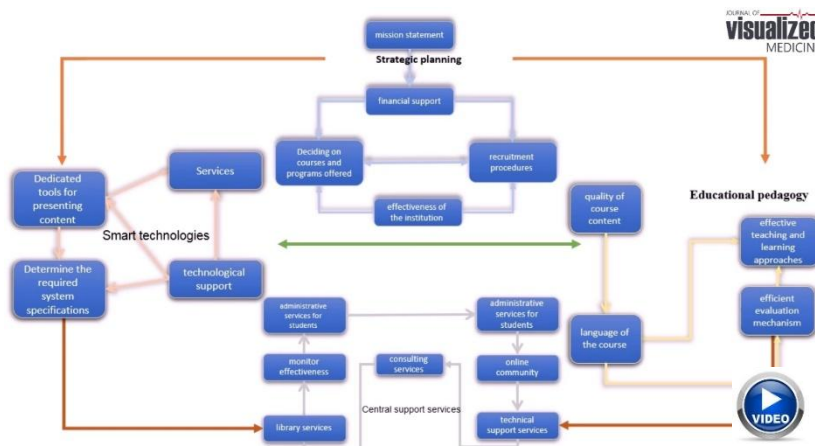
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Highlights:

This research presents a governance framework for virtual universities in higher health education, derived from a systematic review of 13 models and expert interviews. The framework identifies five key subsystems: strategic planning, pedagogy, technology, support services, and contextual factors-offering a structured approach to bolster the effectiveness and adaptability of virtual universities in the digital era.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, the societal structure upon which universities are built is facing accumulated social and economic pressures. Information is increasing rapidly, and it seems impossible to control (1). Knowledge-based economies are struggling to meet ever-increasing demands, making it essential to create new methods for lifelong learning and knowledge acquisition. Universities must move beyond traditional methods and adopt interactive strategies that align with global needs (2).

The term "virtual university" is used to describe "modern" higher education and covers various types of developments. "Virtual university," as a metaphor, represents a complex range of changes affecting established universities. Given the importance of changes facing education, this study identifies the key components of a virtual university and explores the development of its governance model (3).

This study focuses on conceptual considerations and frameworks for implementing virtual universities within the higher health education system. The objectives are to:

1. **Identify Key Components:** Determine the essential elements of an effective virtual university, including technological infrastructure, educational content, and support services.
2. **Evaluate Current Models:** Analyze existing virtual university models to identify best practices and areas for improvement.
3. **Develop a Comprehensive Framework:** Create a detailed framework to guide the development and enhancement of virtual universities, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of learners and the knowledge-based economy.

2. Protocol

In this section, the outcomes from data analysis and synthesized evidence are discussed. Conceptual considerations related to virtual universities highlight the necessity of creating a dynamic and flexible structure to meet increasing societal demands. This study was conducted in several phases using different but related cognitive methods, based on the "best fit" synthetic approach recommended by Christopher Carroll and Andrew Booth (4).

The synthesis of the "best fit" framework involves identifying frameworks, theories, or conceptual models related to a specific health domain. In the

current study, three steps were performed: a systematic review, thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with key informants, and conceptual synthesis (5).

3. Results and Discussion

Two days post-should be characterized e.g. imm In the following study, a systematic review was conducted using the BEHEMOTH method. This approach was specifically developed to provide a template and process for identifying theories, models, and frameworks for developing and testing complex interventions for different types of systematic reviews. In this step, by identifying 13 different models of the virtual university concept, 6 themes of pedagogical component, technology component, management component, educational design, technology implementation, administrative-educational management were extracted. In the second sub-study, using Walker and Brown's thematic analysis approach and conducting individual interviews with 7 key informants in the field of education, 4 topics were identified in terms of educational appearance, technological image, Iranian context and institutional medical education.

In the final step, by synthesizing the results of the two primary studies, the basic elements and the relationship between these elements in a virtual university governance model were identified. The findings provide a detailed understanding of the conceptual framework of virtual universities, particularly within the higher health education system. The results are organized into key themes, reflecting the major aspects of virtual universities.

The study concludes by suggesting future directions for research and development in the field of virtual universities. It calls for ongoing evaluation and improvement of virtual university models, taking into account the rapidly changing technological landscape and evolving educational needs. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of virtual education on student outcomes, the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches in online settings, and the best practices for integrating new technologies into the educational process. There is also a need for comparative studies to evaluate the effectiveness of virtual universities relative to traditional institutions, considering factors such as student satisfaction, learning outcomes, and cost-effectiveness.

This study delves into the conceptual considerations of virtual universities within the higher health

education system. The primary goal is to address the insufficiencies of traditional educational methods in meeting the evolving needs of today's knowledge-based economies. The study employs a systematic review approach, integrating various phases including a thorough search of existing models, theories, and frameworks, as well as qualitative studies and expert opinions. The outcome is a new framework designed to guide the development of virtual universities. This model is identified with five main subsystems in the present study: Strategic planning-educational pedagogy-intelligent technologies-central support services-Iranian context and provisions.

The study concludes that the implementation of this framework can significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of virtual universities. By moving beyond traditional educational methods and adopting a more interactive and adaptable approach, virtual universities can better meet the demands of a global, knowledge-based economy. This framework serves as a strategic guide for educational institutions aiming to develop or improve their virtual university offerings, ensuring they remain relevant and competitive in the digital age. By addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities presented by digital technologies, virtual universities can provide high-quality, accessible, and flexible education to a diverse global student body.

The findings and recommendations from this study provide a valuable framework for the development

and enhancement of virtual universities, ensuring they meet the needs of today's learners and contribute to the advancement of global education.

4. Declarations

Acknowledgment

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Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the School of Medical Education, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences (Code: IR.SBMU.SME.REC.1400.003).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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