

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Identifying and Prioritizing Policy Making Obstacles in the Distance Higher Education System Using the Fuzzy Vicor Technique (Case study: Payame Noor University)

Anvar Shahmohammdi<sup>1</sup> , Feryedon Ahmadi<sup>2</sup> , Bahmani Sayran<sup>3</sup> 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.
3. Master of Department of Public Administration, Payam Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

#### Correspondence:

Anvar Shahmohammdi  
Email: [anvar1354@pnu.ac.ir](mailto:anvar1354@pnu.ac.ir)

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify and prioritize obstacles to policy-making in the distance higher education system using the fuzzy Vicor technique. The research method was a descriptive survey type and the participants were members of the faculty of Payam Noor University in related fields, of which 8 were selected using purposive and criterion-based sampling. The researcher-made research instrument was based on policy-making, which was prepared and adjusted by studying the theoretical foundations and empirical background of the research in the form of 25 items, and its face and content validity was confirmed based on the opinions of experts, and the fuzzy Vicor method was used for data analysis. The research findings led to the identification of obstacles to policy-making in the distance higher education system in three dimensions: design and development, implementation and evaluation, and 25 components in these dimensions. The obstacles of the lack of a comprehensive database and up-to-date and accessible scientific resources and foundations for policy-making and neglect of the degree of influence of the distance higher education system's budget dependence on policy-making were assigned the most and least importance among the obstacles to policy-making in the opinion of experts, respectively. Accordingly, it is suggested that those involved in the distance higher education system should pay more attention to removing the obstacles identified in the results of this research in the three dimensions of design and development, implementation and evaluation of policies.

#### KEYWORDS

Policy Making Obstacles, Distance Learning System, Fuzzy Vicor, Higher Education.



## Introduction

Today, higher education plays an important role for countries in achieving sustainable growth and development. Meanwhile, technological advancements have changed the form of education to a new type of teaching and learning called distance education. Policy-making in the distance higher education system plays an effective role in guiding and managing this area. Educational policymaking includes the principles and policies of the government in the areas of education, as well as a set of laws and regulations that manage the education system. Over the past few decades, higher education worldwide has faced fundamental changes and new challenges. These challenges have led to the need for accountability and responsibility and a shift to new educational systems in the Iranian higher education system. This shift to new approaches, of which distance learning is one, has led organizations to understand fundamental changes in their missions, strategies, roles, programs, needs, methods, and technologies to resolve current knots, ambiguities, and complexities in order to ensure their long-term survival.

Therefore, on the one hand, by reviewing the results of foreign studies, because each of them was conducted for a specific country that has a different educational system from Iran, and on the other hand, in the domestic empirical history, there are studies conducted in the field of policy-making and policy-making in the traditional higher education system. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to the distance education system and a comprehensive conclusion cannot be drawn. Also, in terms of methodology, previous studies have used various methods to obtain information about the views of individuals, but they have not used the fuzzy VICOR approach in examining these factors. Accordingly, the present study aims to identify and prioritize the obstacles to policy-making in the distance higher education system using the fuzzy VICOR technique (case study: Payam Noor University) and seeks to answer the question of what obstacles and how important they are on policy-making in the distance higher education system?

## Method

The research method was descriptive survey type and the statistical population included faculty members of Payame Noor University in the fields of curriculum planning, educational management, higher education management, and distance education. Of these, 8 were selected using purposive and criterion-based sampling. A researcher-made research tool based on policy-making was prepared and adjusted in the form of 25 items by studying the theoretical foundations and empirical background of the research. Its face and content validity were confirmed based on the opinions of experts, and the fuzzy Vicor method was used for data analysis.

## Results

The research findings led to the identification of obstacles to policy-making in the distance higher education system in three dimensions: design and compilation, implementation, and evaluation, and 25 components in these dimensions. The obstacles of not having a comprehensive database and up-to-date and accessible scientific resources and foundations for policy-making and neglecting the degree of influence of the distance higher education system's budget dependence on policy-making were, respectively, the most and least important of the obstacles to policy-making in the eyes of experts.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The findings led to the identification of obstacles to policy-making in three dimensions: design and formulation, implementation, and evaluation. In the design and formulation dimension, the analysis of the results showed that the lack of knowledge, sense of commitment, and necessary skills among policy-makers and implementers, the lack of a comprehensive database and up-to-date and available scientific resources and foundations for policy-making, failure to observe scientific foundations and principles in policy-making, lack of attention to needs assessment in policy-making, disregard for the quality and effectiveness of the distance higher education system in policy-making, vague, general, and pacifist policy-making, neglect of the extent of the influence of the distance higher education system's budget dependence on policy-making, the lack of transparent and reliable rules and regulations in policy-making, and the presence of politicization in the policy-making of the country's higher education system in relation to the distance education system are among the obstacles in this dimension. The findings of the research on ranking the obstacles to policy-making in the distance higher education system in this dimension, according to experts, show that the lack of a comprehensive database and up-to-date and available scientific resources and foundations for policy-making ranks first, and the lack of attention to the scientific foundations and principles of policy-making in the higher education system, consequently, the distance education system ranks second.

The results of the obstacles to policy-making in the implementation dimension showed that the multiplicity of policy-making institutions, lack of will and lack of belief and commitment in implementing policies, vagueness and lack of clarity in the job descriptions for implementing policies in the distance higher education system, lack of human, financial, material and technological resources for implementing policies, lack of appropriate support for implementing codified policies, lack of inter-organizational cooperation in implementing policies in this type of educational system, lack of relative independence and partisan and political view on implementing policies, lack of participation of different groups in implementing policies, structural weakness in the policy-making of the country's higher education system in relation to the distance higher education system, changing direction and going out of order of the policies developed in the implementation stage due to political and managerial changes, and lack of managerial stability due to political changes are among these obstacles.

Obstacles to policy-making in the evaluation dimension are another finding of this research. The results showed that the lack of evaluation and various guarantees for evaluating the policy-making process by the responsible institutions, the weak interaction of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution as the responsible institution for policy-making in evaluating the results of policies, the lack of attention to various inquiries in evaluating the policies themselves, the lack of a comprehensive approach and interaction of the responsible institutions for policy-making in evaluating performance, and the lack of careful monitoring of the policy-making stages are among the obstacles identified in this dimension.

Therefore, the distance higher education system can be sustainable, progressive and successful if it seeks to remove the obstacles facing its policy-making, and it is suggested that the extent to which the policies facing this higher education subsystem are removed be examined in future studies. The findings regarding the identified obstacles indicate the need for changes in the policy process in the distance higher education system and active adaptation to environmental conditions and new technology, which are suggested: 1. Developing scientific foundations for policy-making in the form of guidelines and executive instructions. 2. Providing an integrated, comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible database for policy-making 3. Strengthening a coherent, comprehensive

and efficient structure in distance higher education and consensus on the approach to managing this type of educational system based on its goals and missions in policy-making. 4. Training and nurturing specialized, professional, committed and policy-making human resources in the policy-making process 5. Adequate financial assessment and support and consideration of policy implementation tools. 6. Providing legal guarantees for the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. 7. Explaining the duties, limits of authority and the manner of interaction of policy-making institutions in a precise and transparent manner.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

The sole author was responsible for the study's conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, writing, and final approval of the manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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