

A Soft System Approach to Explore Ill-Defined Issues in Distance Education System - A Case of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract : Nowadays, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world are attempting to utilize Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance learning process and strategies of knowledge delivery for students through Distance Education (DE) system. Stakeholders in DE system face a complex situation of different ill-defined and related issues that influence decision making process. In this study system thinking as a body of knowledge is used to explore the emergent properties that produced from these connections between issues and could have either positive or negative outcomes for the DE development. Checkland Soft System Methodology (SSM) - Mode 2 is employed in a cultural context of Saudi Arabia for more knowledge acquisition purposes among multiple stakeholders in DE rather than solving problems to achieve an overall development of DE system. This paper will discuss some political, cultural issues and connections between them that impact on effectiveness of stakeholders' activities and relations. This study will significantly contribute to both system thinking and education fields by leading decision makers in DE to reconsider future plans, strategies and right actions for more successful educational practices.

Keywords : distance education, higher education institutions, ill-defined issues, soft system methodology-Mode 2

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