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Developing a Legal Framework for Online Higher Education

Lessons from Sudan

Erasmus- EDU-2024-CBHE
Enhancing Higher Education e-Learning Structures and Modules
in Conflict Regions of East Africa
EAGLE - Project 101179512

Workshop-Work package 7
Drafting a Regulatory Framework for Online Higher Education Programs
14-15 July, 2026 South Sudan

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Sudan Experience

CCST managed to continue its activities during:

- COVID
- The Revolution in 2019
- The ongoing war since 2023
- MOHE: Draft created before and updated during the war – How much detailed?
- Open University of Sudan



Why a Legal Framework?

Without regulation...

- Quality becomes inconsistent.
- Students may receive unequal learning opportunities.
- Degrees may lose credibility.
- Institutions develop online programmes using different standards.
- Governments have limited capacity for quality assurance.

With regulation...

- Clear standards
- Student protection
- Institutional accountability
- National recognition
- International credibility



Objectives of the Sudanese Draft Regulation

- regulate all distance-learning programmes;
- establish minimum quality standards;
- ensure institutional readiness;
- protect students;
- promote continuous quality assurance;
- define responsibilities of institutions and government.



Overall structure of the regulation

The draft contains these main chapters:

- 1.The creation of a National Committee for Distance Education
 - 2.Establishment of Distance Education Deanships or Units in Colleges and Universities
 - 3.Approval of academic programmes
- The document is intentionally concise.



National Distance Education Committee (NDEC)

NDEC responsibilities include:

- approving new programmes;
- monitoring implementation;
- recommending policies;
- reviewing quality;
- recommending suspension or withdrawal of approval where standards are not met.

Main lesson

Quality assurance should be continuous—
not limited to the initial approval.



Institutional requirements

Before offering online programmes, each university should establish a dedicated Distance Education Unit or Deanship.

The draft distinguishes between:

- programmes already accredited for face-to-face delivery;
- new programmes developed specifically for online learning.

Requirements include:

- external academic review;
- curriculum approval;
- qualified academic staff;
- institutional readiness.



Digital Infrastructure

The regulation specifies the minimum infrastructure expected:

- Learning Management System (LMS)
- licensed software
- digital library
- reliable internet
- stable electricity
- offices and support facilities
- capacity for producing digital learning materials

Infrastructure is considered part of educational quality.



Human Infrastructure

- Dean of Distance Education (PhD holder)
- Registrar
- Examinations Officer
- Quality Assurance Officer
- LMS Administrator
- Digital Content Specialist
- E-library Officer
- Programme Coordinators (PhD holder)



Lessons from the war in Sudan

The war transformed online education from an option into a necessity. Challenges faced:

- Universities were forced to relocate.
- Campuses were damaged or inaccessible.
- Students and lecturers were displaced across Sudan and abroad.
- Internet and electricity became unreliable.
- Traditional teaching was interrupted for long periods.





STUDENT



Receives learning contents, assessment
Joins a learning community

Submits tasks
Asks
Shares in Forum Chats

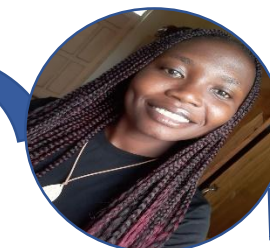


Virtual Tutor

Follows-up every student

Collects reports

Opens courses
Provides access



LMS Manager

Registrar
Financial Office



Web developer

Provides Quality Criteria

Collects reports

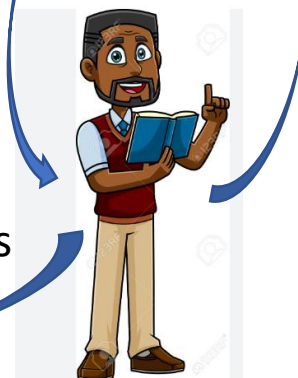


Academic Affairs

Heads of Dept.
Program. Coord.

LECTURER

Loads contents
Setup assignments
Manages a learning community



Receives questions, assignments



smowl
TECH
Online exams safety

Positive outcomes of the war

- Many universities adopted LMSs.
- Lecturers developed digital teaching skills.
- Students became more familiar with online learning.
- Universities discovered that education could continue despite conflict.
- Universities retained human capital.
- Students found a light at the end of a dark tunnel.
- Lecturers obliged to develop well-structured courses.



Final recommendations

Policy

- Develop a clear national strategy for online higher education (maximizing human resources).
- Define minimum quality standards that may become more demanding with the development of the experience (continuous improvement).

Governance

- Establish a national body responsible for oversight and quality assurance.

Require universities to demonstrate readiness in terms of:

- governance;
- human and digital infrastructure;
- financial sustainability;
- internal academic regulations for online programs.