

INVESTIGATING AND COMPARING PAYAME-NOOR UNIVERSITY TEXTBOOKS WITH THE DESIRABLE MODEL OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING UNIVERSITIES TEXTBOOKS

MANOOSH MEHRABI¹, BAHMAN ZANDI², ALI REZA SAFARPOUR^{3*}

¹Assistant professor, Department of e-Learning in Medical Sciences, Virtual School, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.

²Professor of Linguistics, Payame-Noor University, Iran.

³Assistant Professor, Gastroenterohepatology Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks are the main media in open and distance learning universities, including Payame-Noor University. This medium should include features that bring the distance learner to the deepest possible level of learning without the need for a teacher. We have designed and implemented the present research by studying open and distance learning university textbooks and comparing the desirable model with Payame-Noor University books. To achieve the purpose of the research, ie comparing the desirable model with textbooks, we have used the method of descriptive statistics using the mean, standard deviation and percentage, and the inferential statistical method of comparing the means using the "independent t-test". The results of comparing the main elements of this model with the books of Payame-Noor University showed that the mean and standard deviation of the scores of selected books of Payame-Noor University are 50.30 and 14.4, respectively, which is far from the desirable model. At the end, we have provided suggestions for achieving the desirable model.

Keywords: open and distance learning university textbook, content, open educational resources, desirable model, Payame-Noor University.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technologies and the move towards increasingly knowledge-based, interdependent and international societies have created new challenges and opportunities in the planning and implementation of education. Open and distance learning can create new models for teaching and learning; because of its strong link with the development of information and communication technologies, it is closely related to the development of new educational needs and new models of access to information and its application and learning. Evidence suggests that distance learning can lead to innovation in the overall process of education and the scope of its effects extends beyond the realm of education. Therefore, open and distance learning plays a very decisive role in creating a global knowledge-based society.

Open and distance learning as a force contributing to the social and economic progress quickly becomes a reasonable and necessary pillar in the educational systems of both developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2005). Open universities in the world, especially in third world countries, are receiving special attention due to cost reduction and covering a higher percentage of science and knowledge enthusiasts (Rabbani, 2007).

The educational resources used in open and distance learning universities or open educational resources around the world have attracted attention because they share collective organizational, social and cultural knowledge (Petrides and Jimes, 2008).

In the distance learning education system, which does not have a classroom and a teacher in the traditional sense, it is tried to occur the learning-teaching process with appropriate efficiency by using modern educational methods and using various media such as textbooks, laboratory sets, radio and television programs, etc. In most of the universities that work according to this system (including Payame-Noor University), for various reasons, especially economic efficiency and ease of use, the textbook is of special interest and has the greatest role in educating students (Lepionka, 2008).

In distance learning education systems, the content of textbooks is considered as a key element (Rabbani, 2007) (Woodastra and Adria, 2003). The textbook is known as the strongest and most important communication media, the production and processing of information

and knowledge transfer to students (Sheikhzadeh, 2006). Despite the diversity of new educational and information tools, it is one of the most important educational tools at all levels. The book is considered also as a tool in the hands of knowledgeable professors for teaching and a tool in the hands of students to learn and engage in scientific research (Razi, 2006).

A textbook is an organized collection of information related to a subject that is taught in a course. This type of book is usually text, but may include illustrations, drawings, photographs, and other types of descriptions (Chen, 1998: 1). We can consider a textbook a book that is written, designed and produced only for educational use and covers specific educational purposes (Chen, 1998: 12) (Riyazi, 2006) (Educational Assistance Publishing Office, 2000).

The American Textbook Publishers Association (1949) defines the textbook as "Teacher's Print Assistant." The book is the most important resource available to the teacher and learner. Textbooks to some extent determine the content of the curriculum. Regarding the role of the textbook in the structure and activities of the teaching-learning process of the higher education system, it has been said that the textbook is a tool that the teacher uses to motivate students and provide maximum awareness about an issue or subject. Therefore, students' complete and accurate understanding of the textbook is important for optimal learning. In addition, along with the importance of preparing textbook, understanding how to cultivate skills in students to effectively acquire knowledge from textbooks is also very important (Nowruzadeh and Aghazadeh, 2006).

We cannot ignore the impact of textbooks. Textbooks have a significant effect on students' learning experiences.

Despite the existence of books of interest that reach the tenth or higher editions in Iran and the world, unfortunately, the critics have not accept the quality of textbooks in general. Many book authors introduce themselves as educators, while in fact their books pay little attention to the learner and may be they do not know much about theories of cognitive learning or educational psychology and are unfamiliar with textbook production. All of these issues are evident in some writings (Lepionka, 2007).

What is certain is that the studies and researches done on university textbooks are not appropriate and need deeper and broader researches (Jafarzadeh Afshari, 2006). It seems that in order to achieve the desirable productivity in writing textbooks and increase their efficiency and effectiveness, it is necessary to make effective and fruitful efforts to strengthen the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses of existing textbooks. In any case, the issue of the efficiency of university textbooks is one of the most important challenges in higher education in different countries. The efficiency of academic textbooks has a significant relationship with supplies that without preparing and organizing them, it would not be reasonable to expect the effectiveness of the textbook (Dadgar, 2006). In fact, the above statement shows that being an expert in the field of a science does not mean having expertise in publishing a textbook that is equally multifaceted, multi-layered and diverse (Abolhassani, 2006).

In Payame-Noor University, as one of the custodians of the distance education system, education is provided through the main media and comprehensive support occurs through communication media (Rabbani, 2007: 5 and 6). It has faced problems like other third world countries. In the meantime, self-study textbooks may play a very important role in compensating for these problems (Rabbani, 2007). Lack of access to reliable resources and lack of interaction between teacher and student are among the most important disadvantages of open and distance learning universities in terms of learning quality (Seraji et al., 2008). If there are deficiencies in the textbooks, the need to form face-to-face classes seems necessary; this contradicts the *raison d'être* of the distance education system (Atai and Ali Mohammadi, 1992).

The purpose of compiling each book is to fill the gap between the teacher (as the author) and the learner (as the reader), so that the result of the teacher's thought can be transferred to the learner in a way that minimizes the need for the teacher.

In the current situation, due to the evolution of human knowledge and the change and adjustment of many topics, especially in the field of humanities, the method of compiling a university textbook also needs to be revised and sharpened in another way (Zein al-Dini Meymand, 2006).

Open and distance education is expanding in Iran. Open education is aimed at opening the way to access educational facilities, freeing the learner from time and space constraints and providing him / her with flexible opportunities. At the same time, more emphasis is placed on enrichment and quality improvement (UNESCO, 2005: 13 and 14).

We cannot ignore E-books when it comes to textbooks in open and distance learning. Since the maximum possible communication between the teacher and the distance learner is created through the educational text, especially the textbook, it is necessary that these books be designed and compiled in a way that minimizes the need for the presence of the teacher. Knowing these desirable characteristics helps the teacher to use his best tools to create more depth in his learning, despite the physical distance with the learner. In fact, what expresses the need of our current society is to adopt an open content approach; that is, content that, in addition to reducing the learner's need for a real-time teacher, incorporates special features into the printed academic textbook and enhances the interaction between the teacher and the learner.

Therefore, according to the issues raised in this research, we are trying to answer the question to what extent the textbooks of Payame-Noor University are compatible with the desirable model of textbooks of open and distance learning universities?

Research background

Sattar (2005) conducted a study entitled "Studying the relationship between students' needs and interests and learning the contents of university textbooks". This study was conducted with the method of library studies and with the aim of answering the question of how to present appropriate objective, scientific and practical criteria as desirable features to prepare and compile the content of the academic textbook. In response to this question, he has used the method of

library studies. The results of the research showed that with appropriate researches, we can accurately identify and analyze students' needs and interests by differentiating them into different dimensions and aspects and by considering appropriate criteria and standards; then, regarding the obtained results, we can establish a relationship between different types of learning materials and their application in different situations and opportunities of life. Finally, with continuous evaluations (of various dimensions) and flexible changes over time, we can introduce desirable and appropriate features for the preparation and presentation of academic textbooks.

In a research entitled "Studying the criteria for compiling textbooks in the books of the BSc courses of educational sciences", Nasr et al (2006) have studied and reviewed the relevant specialized texts. Based on these studies, they extracted the desirable criteria for academic textbooks. These criteria included: appearance and writing, structural, content and psychological characteristics. Then, they selected 20 academic textbooks in the field of educational sciences, and examined the extent to which the criteria mentioned in these books were observed. The results of this research showed that many textbooks in the field of educational sciences are far from the desirable textbook. Existing textbooks need to be fundamentally revised in terms of appearance, writing, structure, and attention to psychological principles; the contents of the books should be fundamentally revised every few years, in line with national and international scientific advances.

In another study entitled "Introducing a Model for Compiling a Sociology Textbook" in 2007, Fazel introduces the SQ3R method, which is the key word of the word (survey, question, reading, memorization and reviewing); it helps the student to better understand the important ideas of the book, to perceive them quickly, to remember the important points and to review them efficiently for testing. In this method, to compile each chapter, we give first the objectives of the chapter, defining the main concept of the lesson, explaining the topics of the lesson through questioning, providing feedback in several parts of the chapter, mentioning a report from the same topic on TV, presenting a section entitled Doing research on the subject of the lesson introducing a section entitled Critical Thinking that contains questions from the student, and finally providing an exercise and questions at the end of the chapter.

Armand, Jamali Zavareh and Nasr (2008) conducted another study entitled "Academic Textbook Evaluation Criteria". Its purpose was to prepare a textbook evaluation checklist that could cover all aspects as much as possible. Findings showed that in terms of appearance, writing and content, all three books had more than 70% of the specified features. Structurally, only one of the books had designated features. In terms of psychological features, only the same book had the specified features.

Downes (2007) conducted another study entitled "Open Learning Resource Models". It outlines the availability of open learning resources under three models: cost, technique, and content. The reason for this division lies in the definition of open educational resources. At the beginning of the discussion, after mentioning the necessities of open educational resources and defining educational resources, the author defines the word *open*. He concludes that since openness can have multiple definitions, so models can also be multiple. Discussion and suggestion focus on the issue that employing open source volunteers and drawing incentives, employing the academic community and attracting their cooperation, cooperating in the production and sharing of tasks, management of distribution and control can be part of the needs in providing open educational resources.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a survey in terms of approach and part of it is a case study. It is also typically an applied-developmental research. Based on the purpose of the research, which is to compare the desirable model of open and distance learning university textbooks (Mehrabi, Zandi)

with Payame-Noor University textbooks, we used the tool for assessing of Payame-Noor University textbooks. We compared the mean of scores in the two groups of humanities and basic sciences with each other and with a desirable model.

We used boundary sampling to compare Payame-Noor University textbooks with the desirable model. In fact, the books of Payame-Noor University, which were selected as the best books in 2006 by the Vice Chancellor for Research, Payame-Noor University, were studied in this research. Finally, we reviewed 20 textbooks of Payame-Noor University, which were selected as the top textbooks of the university in the humanities and basic sciences departments in 2006 by the Vice Chancellor for Research.

Research tools

The tool used in the research was a checklist. We collected information related to each of the selected textbooks of Payame-Noor University. The tool had face validity based on experts' opinion, content validity index for each item (CVI calculation method: Dividing the number of experts agreeing for the expressions ranked 3 and 4 by the total number of experts), and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0.903).

Data analysis method

We used descriptive statistics (mean and percentage) and inferential statistics (comparison of means using t-test of two independent groups).

FINDINGS

To evaluate the proportion between Payame-Noor University textbooks and the desirable model of open and distance learning university textbooks, we designed the main elements of the desirable model in the form of a check list and after determining its validity and reliability (0.903) which based on Standard classification, this Cronbach's alpha value is in the excellent group for analysis; we then calculated the scores of the sample books of Payame-Noor University (20 samples) out of 100 cases. Two types of books participated in this study: humanities books and basic sciences books.

In addition to comparing the total score of the obtained books with the score of 100 of the desirable model, we compared the mean scores of the groups of Humanities and Basic Sciences in the main elements of the model. We have described the total scores and scores obtained from each of the structural, visual, written, and methodological categories in Diagrams 1 to 5, respectively.

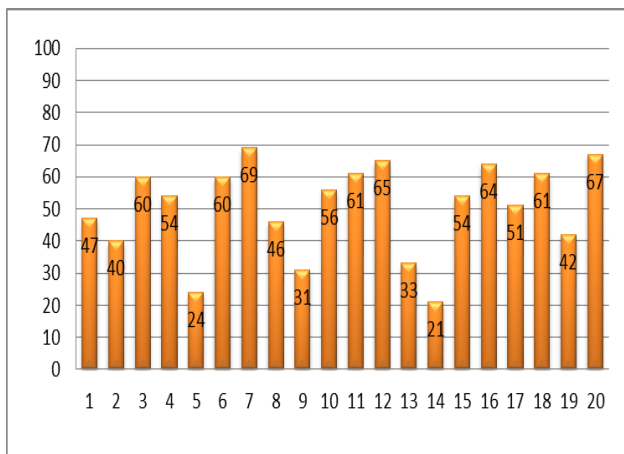


Diagram 1: Crude Scores of books at Payame-Noor University out of 100 based on the desirable model

According to this diagram, the highest score belongs to book number 7 with 69 scores or 69% of the points obtained from the desirable model.

The lowest score is for book number 14 and the average score is 50.30. The standard deviation of the total scores of the books is 14.4.

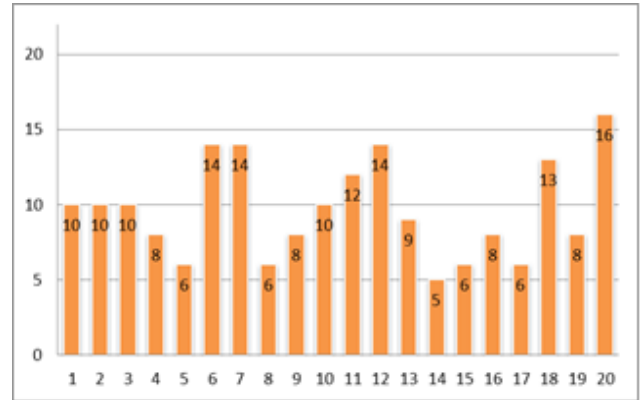


Diagram 2: Structural criteria scores of Payame-Noor University books from 22 based on the desirable model

The highest score of structural criteria is for book number 20, which has 16 scores out of 22 ones. The lowest score is for Book 14, which has 5 out of 22 scores. The average scores of structural criteria in all books are 9.65 out of 22 and their standard deviation is 3.24.

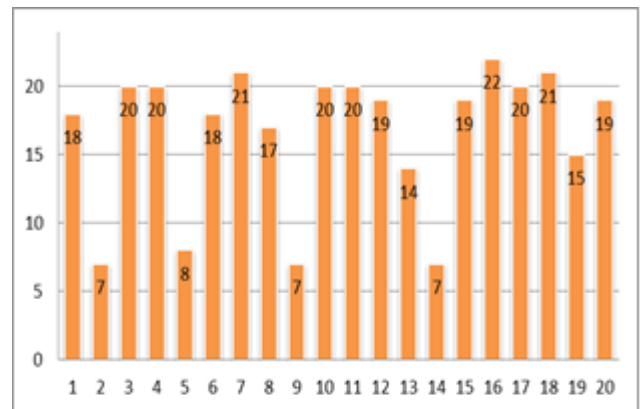


Diagram 3: Scores of visual criteria of Payame-Noor University books from 24 based on the desirable model

The highest score of visual criteria belongs to book number 16 by 22; the lowest score have obtained the books 2, 9 and 14 by 7. The average of the total scores of visual criteria is 16.6 out of 24 and their standard deviation is 5.16.

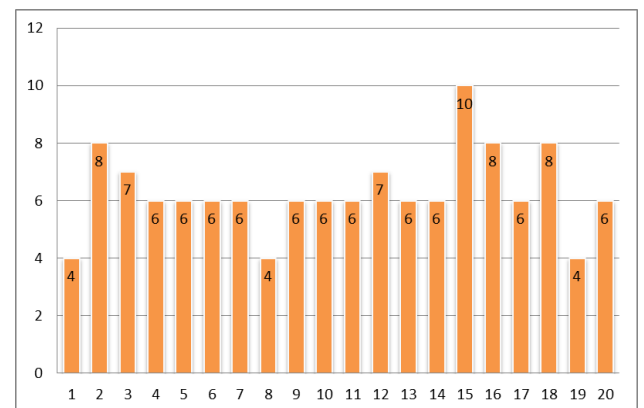


Diagram 4: Scores of written criteria of Payame Noor University books out of 12 based on the desirable model

The highest score is for book number 15 and the lowest score for books number 1, 8 and 19. The mean of total scores of written criteria and their standard deviation were 6.3 and 1.45, respectively.

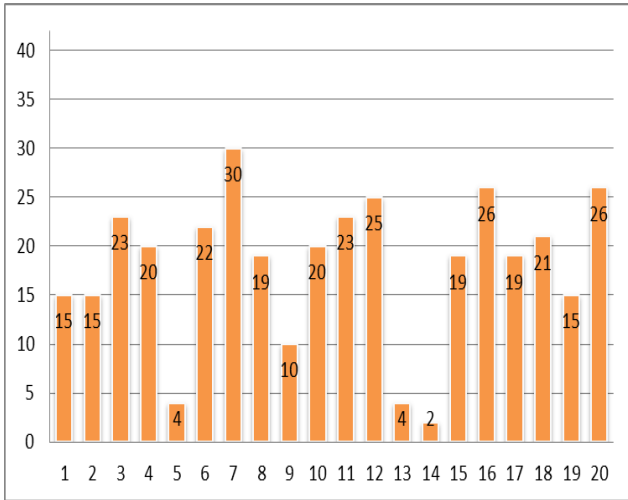


Diagram 5: Scores of methodological criteria of Payame Noor University books from 42 based on the desirable model

The highest score of this section belongs to book number 7 and the lowest score is for book number 14. The average of methodological elements in these books is 17.9 out of 42 and their standard deviation is 7.76.

We use the following hypothesis to compare the mean of the humanities and basic sciences based on the total score:

Hypothesis 1: The mean scores of all textbooks of Payame-Noor University are different in the groups of humanities and basic sciences. To test this hypothesis, we compared the means of these two groups using t-test of two independent groups; we have given the results of this analysis in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of the mean of humanities and basic sciences based on the total score and using t-test of two independent groups

Mean	Standard deviation	p-value	d _{cohen}	95% CI
Humanities: 47.07	63.16	0.971	0.734	0.093-1.374
Basic sciences: 56.28	21.6			

This table shows that the mean score of two groups of books are not significantly different from each other. Hypothesis 1 is therefore confirmed.

We proposed the following hypotheses to compare the mean of each of the structural, visual, written and methodological scores in the two groups of humanities and basic sciences:

1. The mean structural scores of Payame-Noor University textbooks are different in the groups of humanities and basic sciences.
2. The mean visual scores of Payame-Noor University textbooks are different in the groups of humanities and basic sciences.
3. The mean written scores of Payame-Noor University textbooks are different in the groups of humanities and basic sciences.
4. The mean methodological scores of Payame-Noor University textbooks are different in the groups of humanities and basic sciences.

The results of examining the above hypotheses using independent t-test of two groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of the mean of humanities and basic sciences groups based on the scores of each section using t-test of two independent groups

Criterion	Mean	Standard deviation	p-value
Structural	Humanities: 9.46	3.64	0.734
	Basic sciences: 10	2.58	
Visual	Humanities: 15	5.83	0.056 (significant)
	Basic sciences: 19.57	0.78	
Written	Humanities: 6.46	1.66	0.513
	Basic sciences: 6	1	
Methodological	Humanities: 16.38	9.1	0.244
	Basic sciences: 20.71	3.3	

This table shows that the differences between the means of books in the two groups of basic sciences and humanities are not significant except in the visual subset. Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 are therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Open and distance learning universities have been formed around the world to create flexibility in the time and place of learning. The most important media used by professors and students in these universities and other universities in the world is academic textbooks. From the beginning, Payame-Noor University has set this type of learning as its educational model.

We have designed the present research with regard to the importance of such books and with the aim of achieving the desirable model of open and distance learning university textbooks.

In order to achieve the second goal of the research, ie comparing the books of Payame-Noor University with the desirable model, we used a checklist of the main elements of the model (50 features); which had acceptable validity and reliability. Then we compared Payame-Noor books with it.

The main question of the research is to what extent do the textbooks of Payame Noor University fit with the desirable model of open and distance learning university textbooks?

According to Diagram 1, the scores of Payame Noor University books were compared with the desirable model. The results showed that the highest score belonged to book number 7 with 69%. The lowest score belonged to book number 14 by 20%. The mean of the total scores was 50.30 and its standard deviation was 14.4. Since the selected books in Payame-Noor University have been the selected books of this university, we expect they get more scores. To find the relevant criteria that have led to low scores in the books, the four diagrams described below examine these scores more closely.

In Diagram 2, the structural elements of Payame-Noor University textbooks were compared with the desirable model. Book number 20 has the highest score of structural elements and book number 14 has the lowest score of this section. The average of structural elements is 9.65 out of 22 (43.86). The standard deviation of the scores is 3.24. These elements include items that can easily be provided to teachers by a written guide and used by them when writing.

These elements form the structure and body of a textbook. When reading a textbook, a student can get an overview of the book by examining these elements, some before the text and some after the text.

Diagram 3 shows the scores obtained from the visual elements. According to this Diagram, book number 16 has the highest score and books number 2, 9 and 14 have the lowest score. But the mean scores

of visual criteria were 16.6 out of 24 (69.16%) and the standard deviation of the scores was 5.16. These criteria include cases that cover all visual elements of the text, including images, diagrams, and related tables, as well as the print aspects and overall space of a text page. Paying attention to the visual quality of these elements and considering features such as the spatial proximity of these elements with the relevant text, providing relevant sources, presenting the number of elements in the text and also paying attention to the quality of printed aspects of the text can improve these features. The presence of a graphic designer in the editing team can help improve the quality of this aspect of the textbook.

Diagram 4 examines the writing elements of a textbook. Paying attention to these elements causes the presented text to create a deeper connection with the reader and to be adjusted to his/her level and learning goals. The highest score obtained from this section is for book number 15 and the lowest score is for books number 1, 8 and 19. The mean of total scores in this section was 6.3 out of 12 (52.5%) and the standard deviation of scores was 1.45.

Diagram 5 examines the methodological elements in the textbooks of Payame-Noor University. This Diagram shows that the highest score was for book number 7 and the lowest score was for book number 14. The mean of these elements in the books of Payame-Noor University was 17.9 out of 42 (42.61%) and the standard deviation was 7.76. These elements are the heart of an academic textbook, especially an open and distance learning academic textbook; because by predicting teaching methods, they introduce a method when writing. By observing these characteristics, the author can compensate for his absence with the learner and establish a meaningful relationship with the audience. Unfortunately, these elements have not received much attention in the textbooks of Payame-Noor University.

These results are in line with the results of research done by Nasr et al. (2006). In this research, the studied books of the BSc courses of educational sciences are far from the desirable textbook. The researcher of this research considers that the reason for this is the lack of specific criteria for writing a book and compiling it based on the author's personal interests and views.

As a sub-objective in this research, we compared the mean scores of Payame-Noor University books in the humanities and basic sciences with each other. The results of statistical analysis using t-test of two independent groups showed that the mean scores of these two groups (humanities: 47.07, basic sciences: 56.28) are not significantly different from each other ($p = 0.179$).

We compared also the means obtained from structural, visual, written and methodological criteria in both groups with each other. Statistical analysis using t-test of two independent groups on these means showed that these two groups in structural, written and methodological criteria are not significantly different. But the visual criteria obtained by the group of Basic Sciences were significantly higher than the scores obtained by the group of Humanities ($p = 0.056$).

The results of the above analyzes show that although there is a difference between the humanities and basic sciences and the average raw numbers obtained for the basic sciences are higher than the humanities, but the differences are not statistically significant.

It seems that in the basic sciences group, the standard deviation of the scores from the average is less than in the humanities group; this means that in the basic sciences group, there are very high and very low scores and the deviation of the scores from the average is higher. In general, the highest score of books belongs to the humanities group. Regarding visual elements, there is a significant difference between these elements in the group of humanities and basic sciences. Perhaps the reason can be attributed to the nature of the basic science textbooks, which it is possible to create a deeper understanding of them by adding visual elements. Humanities are more abstract and it may not be possible to add related visual elements to them.

In general, the results of this part of the research showed that the selected books of Payame-Noor University were able to obtain 50.30% of the criteria of the desirable model of open and distance learning

university textbooks. This result shows that the authorship of university textbooks in this university, which is one of the custodians of the open and distance learning system in Iran, should be the order of the day.

It seems that in order to achieve the desirable productivity in writing textbooks and increase their efficiency and effectiveness, it is necessary to make effective and fruitful efforts to strengthen the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses of existing textbooks. In any case, the issue of university textbook efficiency is one of the most important challenges in higher education in different countries. The efficiency of the academic textbook has a significant relationship with the accessories and considerations without which the effectiveness of the textbook would not be expected to be reasonable (Dadgar, 2006).

The best books written at Payame-Noor University were as follows:

1. Macroeconomics 1
2. Corrective movements
3. Mathematical statistics 1

The books also that received the highest score of structural criteria were as follows:

1. Corrective movements
2. Mathematical statistics 1, macroeconomics 1 and accounting principles 1
3. Basics of urban geography

The books that received the highest scores of the visual criteria were also the following:

1. Fundamentals of organization and management
2. Fundamentals of urban geography and macroeconomics 1
3. Principles of design of compilers and mathematical analysis 1, plant physiology 3, statistical mechanics and land and water resources

The books that received the highest scores of the written elements are also the following:

1. Foundations of neuropsychology
2. History of Western philosophy, basics of organization and management and basics of urban geography
3. Mathematical statistics 1 and land and water resources

Finally, the books that had the highest score of methodological elements were the following:

1. Macroeconomics 1
2. Fundamentals of organization and management and corrective movements
3. Mathematical statistics 1

We should note that 8 cases (40%) of the books had a score below 50 and 4 cases (20%) had a score below 40. In contrast, 6 cases (30%) had a score above 60 and only 2 cases (10%) had a score above 65.

Findings based on this question showed that the books of this university need to be revised; so, the followings are suggested:

1. Possibility of online shopping or creating an internet access for downloading books.
2. Keeping up with technological advances and using them in the design and implementation of textbook compilation.
3. Preparing a specific process and structure for compiling a book at Payame Noor University.
4. Emphasis on the methodological aspects of the desirable model that have obtained the lowest score among other elements.

According to the obtained results, in order to further research in this field, we suggest to future researchers to study the process of writing books by professors with a long history of writing and students' experiences in studying different types of textbooks.

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