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Evaluating Distance Education Experience in Public Schools in Amman Second Directorate from Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The current study aimed to evaluate the experience of distance education in the public schools in Amman second directorate in light of the COVID-19 pandemic from students' perspectives. To that aim, the descriptive survey approach was used in addition to a questionnaire spread over five domains: communication, content, teaching, interaction, assessment in which validity and reliability were verified. The study sample included 354 male and female students, chosen by the stratified random method from four public schools. The results of the study showed that the students' evacuation of the distance education experience on the instrument as a whole was moderate. The findings also indicated that there were statistically significant differences attributed to gender variable in the interaction domain and the instrument as a whole in favor of females, while the differences were not statistically significant for other domains. Based on the results, the researchers recommended the necessity of changing the evaluation approach and modifying the content and teaching methods to suit distance education, overcoming technical and technological difficulties, and conducting other research to evaluate distance education in secondary and lower elementary schools.

Keywords: Amman Second directorate, COVID-19 pandemic, Distance education.

Introduction

Currently, people all over the world have been affected by coronavirus disease and social distancing was adopted in many places to contain the problem. Since its outbreak in late 2019, it has created unprecedented havoc in all areas and escalated into a global pandemic. Like any vital sector, education has been severely affected, numerous countries around the world decided to close schools nationwide to prevent or contain the spread of the virus, resulting in a sudden, global shift to distance education that has proven to be out of control for teachers, students, and parents alike.

In order to pursue the continuity of the teaching-learning process during schools closures, educational institutions had to create distance-learning opportunities to enable students to complete their academic year and to follow their lessons remotely by employing technology as a mediator in the educational communication process and to fast-track online education plans.

Distance-learning due to the flexibility in the learning process and the use of technologies constitutes key factors in education for sustainable development; it allows students to become familiar with the necessary skills and competencies and goes beyond the limits of time and place to increase teacher–student interaction which is the core activity of education (Bigirwa, et al., 2020; Korkmaz & Mirici, 2021).

Jordan, as is currently the case all over the world, has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To control the spread of the virus, several decisions have been declared including containment, state of a health emergency, and closure of schools and universities which brought the risk of increased learning inequality, consequently, distance learning was adopted to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to complete the course program. According to the report of the Ministry of Education (ESC, 2020) there are negative trends towards distance education; parents were surprised and claim that distance learning program does not adequately provide services for students. 50% of the technological equipment in schools is old, unsuitable, and does not accommodate distance education which raised the voices to return to in-person schools.

Encouraging remote work through a range of interventions and preventing all forms of physical contact to reduce the risk of infection have been a cornerstone of the world health organization in the context of COVID-19 (Yulia, 2020).

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Accordingly, the government of Jordan has responded well to corona crisis by taking a number of precautionary measures in all different areas of life.

The ministry of education, in turn, was quick to respond by introducing two different delivery methods for distance learning through television and the creation of an online portal to ensure the continuity of learning and teaching processes.

Literature Review

A rock solid piece of evidence can be traced in finding out the global experiences and practices in the field of distance education. Empirical research on the potential effect of using distance education in teaching has yielded effective results.

Al-Haib (2021) conducted a study aimed to evaluate the experience of distance education in light of the covid 19 pandemic from the perspectives of school principals, teachers and students in the state of Palestine, and to achieve the goal of the study, the descriptive approach was adopted in addition to a questionnaire prepared for collecting data. The study sample consisted of (90) principals, (320) teachers and (169) students. The findings revealed that the students' response to the benefit of distance education was below average.

Ahmed (2021) investigated the reality of distance education in light of the Covid 19 pandemic in secondary schools in Egypt from students and teachers' perspectives. The research sample consisted of (250) male and female students, (130) male and female teachers who were randomly selected. The results showed that while there has been a tremendous increase in the use of online distance learning in various regions, there are still some barriers to distance learning which can hamper or completely prevent the utilization of distance learning by some groups, such as the lack of direct communication between teachers and learners, ignoring social and recreational activities, little catering for individual differences and the high internet subscription fees.

Draissi and Yong (2020) conducted a study to find out the response plan to the outbreak of the corona pandemic during implementing distance education in Moroccan Universities. Content analysis method was used to examine various documents, daily newspaper, reports and notifications from the University website. The results indicated that corona pandemic has caused difficulties for both students and professors to continue distance education, moreover, the new teaching methods contributed to providing free access to few paid e-learning platforms or databases.

Miqdadi (2020) examined students' perception of distance education in Jordan public schools in light of the corona crisis and its developments. (167) learners were selected in the secondary schools, directorate of Kasbah Irbid. The descriptive survey approach was used in addition to a questionnaire developed for collecting data. The results revealed a large positive impact for the use of distance education in light of the corona pandemic, in addition to eradicating many educational problems and enriching students' learning.

Ahmed and Othman (2020) conducted a study aimed at knowing the effectiveness of using virtual classes (WIZIQ) on students' achievement, motivation and attitudes at the college of education at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. To that aim, the study followed the quasi-experimental approach, the researchers used a cognitive achievement test, motivation scale and attitude scale as instruments for collecting data, a random sample of (42) learners in the college of education and information technology was selected. The findings showed that the experimental group developed a positive attitude towards the use of virtual classrooms (WIZIQ) in their learning; furthermore, the learners in the experimental group were more involved and motivated for distance learning compared to their counterparts in the control group.

Samuel, et al., (2020), investigated the learners' perception of the availability, accessibility, usefulness and impact of educational technologies in distance education in Nigeria, a random sample of (397) learners were selected. To achieve the objectives of the study the researchers followed the descriptive survey approach, and developed a questionnaire for data collection. The findings indicated that students' perceptions of distance learning were positive, the learners showed great interest in distance education and the educational technologies despite being not sufficiently available.

Bigirwa, et al., (2020) conducted a study aimed to identify whether instructional design was an influencer of e-learning adoption and profile the salient instructional design traits relevant to e-learning adoption in Midwifery schools in Uganda. Ten schools were sampled with 224 participants. The descriptive analytical approach was used in addition to a questionnaire and interview questions developed for gathering data. The results showed that 61% of the sample is satisfied with the use of distance education programs and their importance in obtaining knowledge and skills.

In light of the forgoing, it can be felt that some previous studies stressed on the effectiveness of distance education in teaching and the fruitful results that could be gained while others focused on its negative impacts.

The current study benefited from previous studies in presenting and enriching the theoretical literature, developing the study instrument, determining the methodology used and discussing the results, and aimed to evaluate distance education experience in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from students' perspectives in light of corona pandemic.

Problem of the study

There is a plethora of research which suggests that educators should take advantage of utilizing distance education.

However, it is still matter of controversy. According to (Iivari et al, 2020), the quality of instruction, misuse of technology, and the attitudes of instructors have affected on the overall quality of distance learning as a product, which obliged students to leave learning, while others benefited from distance education and became more self-directed than before.

Mohammed and kainat (2020) confirmed that online education cannot produce the desired results in underdeveloped countries where a vast majority of students are unable to access the internet due to technical as well as financial issues. The lack of face-to-face interaction with the instructor, response time and absence of traditional classroom socialization were among some other issues highlighted by higher education students.

The report of Economic and Social Council in Jordan (ESC, 2020) referred to the negative attitudes of students towards education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; distance education put a burden on students and caused them to respond differently than they might in a traditional classroom setting. Furthermore, students in high-poverty communities fell further behind their peers, exacerbating gaps in education due to the lack of equipment, infrastructure, and poor effective technical assistance.

On the contrary, Deepika (2020) confirmed that there is satisfaction among both teachers and students about classes and online lectures in terms of quality, technical support and interaction between students and their teachers. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate distance education experience in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from students' perspectives. Answers to the following research questions were sought in this study and drove the collection of the subsequent data:

1. What is the evaluation of distance education in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from students' perspectives in light of the corona pandemic?
2. Does students' evaluation differ according to gender?

Objectives of the study

Although the literature regarding online education is expanding, studies related to the quality of online education are limited. Among those examined, few researchers have examined the quality of online education from the students' perspective. Therefore, there is a need to investigate students' evaluation of distance education. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the distance education experience in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from students' perspectives in light of the corona pandemic, and to identify the impact of gender on students' evaluation of distance education experience.

Significance of the study

After reviewing the studies about distance education, it was valued as extremely important in the teaching learning process. The findings of the current study are expected to contribute to educational literature by providing potentially significant information and new insights on evaluating the distance education experience in light of the corona pandemic and the effectiveness of using distance education in developing students' performance and coping with the recent trends in teaching. Also, the theoretical literature, instruments, results and recommendations of the study may lead to conducting complementary research and studies on this subject. The results should hopefully enable institutions offering online education to evaluate their programs based on the findings and the recommendations in this study and develop the experience in light of the study findings and adopt distance education along with in-person education in exceptional (the spread of the epidemic) and non-exceptional circumstances; in order to raise generations capable of facing the challenges of their time.

Definition of Term

Distance learning: As defined by the American association, it is a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide range of technologies to reach learners at a distance (Moore, 1991).
Education: Teaching and learning process that is provided through public and private schools in the basic and secondary levels.
Coronavirus: An infectious disease called COVID-19 emerged in December 2019 and has caused respiratory illness. The disease has since spread worldwide, leading to an ongoing pandemic.

Limitations of the study

The generalizability of the findings may be limited to evaluating distance education from the students' perspectives in four public primary schools in Amman Second Directorate in the academic year 2020/2021, in addition to being limited to the validity and reliability of the study instrument, the accuracy and objectivity of the respondents. Therefore, the results are only generalized to the same society from which the sample was drawn and other similar societies.

Methodology and Procedures

The descriptive survey approach was used to evaluate the distance education experience in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from the students' perspectives in light of COVID-19 through an instrument prepared by the researchers after extracting its psychometric properties.

Study sample and population

The study population consisted of the students enrolled in the academic year 2020/2021 in four public schools in Amman Second Directorate. The study sample consisted of male and

female students, who were drawn from the study population by stratified random sampling method (n = 354) in the basic education stage, as shown in Table (1).

Study instrument

Based on an extensive review of the literature and to achieve the objectives of the study, a 15- item questionnaire spread over five domains (Communication, content, teaching, interaction, assessment) was developed to evaluate the distance education experience in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from the students' perspectives in light of COVID-19.

Validity and reliability of the study instrument

In order to examine the apparent validity of the instruments, a panel of educational experts reviewed the instrument. The team was asked to validate the content of the instruments concerning its items, appropriateness to the purposes of the current study, the language clarity, and how well they represent the evaluation of distance education experience. The teams' comments and recommendations were studied carefully and taken into account in amending the final version of the instrument.

To check the construct validity of the test, it was applied to a pilot study of 43 students. The test reliability coefficient was estimated using the internal consistency method. The correlation coefficient between the score of each item and the total score ranged between (0.51-0.72) that was considered suitable to conduct the study. The correlation coefficients were also calculated among the domains of the questionnaire and the total score as shown in Table 2:

Table 1: The distribution of the study sample on the four public schools.

School	*Gender*	*No*
Zaid bin al-Khattab	Male	72
Ali Reda Al-Rikabi		71
Total males		143
Khansa'	Female	100
Khawla Bint Al Azores		111
Total females		211
TOTAL		354

Table 2 shows that the values of the correlation coefficients among the domains and the total score as a whole ranged between (.519** and .834**) and found acceptable and statistically significant.

A Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis was conducted on the same pilot study as shown in table 3:

Table 3 shows a very good item-scale correlation with the reliability coefficient Alpha being (.831**), while the values of the questionnaire dimensions ranged between (.616** and .831**), which were considered high and suitable to conduct the study.

The students' responses were analyzed in terms of the five-point Likert scale; (*strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree* with the numerical values of (*five, four, three, two* and *one*) respectively which was further categorized into three levels: high, intermediate, and Low degrees. Thus, the scores of the questionnaire as a whole range between (17-85), so that the higher the score, the more positive opinions the students have about distance education experience. Mean scores were valued against the following criteria: (1.00 - 2.33 as Weak; 2.34 - 3.66 as intermediate; 3.67- 5.00 as Strong). The percentage was calculated according to the following equation: The highest value – The lowest value/category number. In the present research, the highest value was 5; the lowest value was 1; and the category numbers were 3. Thus, the appropriate class intervals were calculated as follows: 5-1/3 = 1.33

Study procedures

The following procedures were carried out in the course of the study:

1. The researchers reviewed the related literature to narrow the topic and aggregate the theoretical and empirical research related to the topic.
2. The instrument of the study was designed.
3. The validity of the instruments was established by a jury of experts.
4. The population and sample of the study were identified.
5. The study instrument was distributed during the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021 through an electronic link using the Google form program, to the (seventh, eighth, and ninth) students.

Table 2: The correlation coefficients among the domains of the questionnaire and the total score from the students' perspectives

Dimension	*Communication*	*content*	*teaching*	*interaction*	*evaluation*
Communication	1				
content	.655**	1			
teaching	.524**	.755**	1		
interaction	.521**	.619**	.765**	1	
assessment	.529**	.604**	.952**	.834**	1
Total score	.519**	.603**	.612**	.541**	.812**

Table 3: Reliability coefficients for the study instrument to evaluate distance education experience

Dimension	*Cronbach's alpha*
Communication	.638**
Content	.724**
Teaching	.616**
Interaction	.640**
Assessment	.712**
Total score	.831**

Table 4: Mean scores and standard deviations of the students' responses on the instrument domains

Domain	*Mean*	*SD*	*Degree*	*Rank*
content	2.65	0.614	Medium	5
interaction	3.12	0.871	Medium	4
Communication	3.39	0.689	Medium	3
teaching	3.49	0.723	Medium	2
assessment	3.85	0.657	High	1
Total score	3.30	0.356	Medium	

6. Data was collected electronically.
7. The results of the study were obtained through appropriate statistical analyses.
8. The findings of the study were analyzed and discussed according to the questions of the study.
9. The recommendations were set based of the results of the study.

Results and Discussion

Result of the first research question

The first research question sought the evaluation of distance education in public schools in Amman Second Directorate from students' perspectives in light of the corona pandemic. To answer this question, the mean scores and standard deviations of the students' responses on the study instrument were calculated as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4 depicts that the average response of students' evaluation on the instrument as a whole was medium with a mean score of (3.30) and a standard deviation of (0.356). This may be attributed to the novelty of the experience and students' lack of necessary electronic devices, in addition to the distractions that are a reality of online learning.

This seems to be in line with (Muhammed & kainat 2020) and (ESC, 2020) who confirmed that online education cannot produce desired results in poor countries, and shows the students' negative attitudes towards distance education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; which places a burden on students and makes them lag further behind their peers, exacerbating education gaps due to lack of equipment, infrastructure and poor effective technical assistance.

It is also consistent with the report entitled (The Role of the Family in Distance Education) which indicates that education in the digital space is pervasive, students are drained to exhaustion by online learning and unable to focus and continue learning (Educational Futures, 2020)

The result also matches with the study of (Bigirwa, et al., 2020) which concluded that 61% of the study sample is satisfied with the use of distance education programs, and its effect in obtaining knowledge and skills. It also agreed with (Al - Haib, 2021) who indicated that the students' benefit from distance education was below average, and that there are challenges facing school principals and teachers as a result of using distance education; such as cheating in online exams and students' lack of experience in using distance education.

Analysis of the Domains

With regard to the domains of the study, the assessment domain ranked first with a mean score of 3.85, (SD.657) and got a high degree which might be attributed to online exams. Generally speaking, fear is one of the common things that students face when they attend exams. However, online exams and stress-free environment reduce their potential anxiety, stress and factors associated with them. Moreover, it can also be explained by the positive role of parents in facilitating students' participation, interaction and motivation (Borup, 2016).

Teaching domain ranked second with a mean score of 3.49 (SD ,723) and got a medium degree. This might be attributed to the fact that distance education has many advantages over physical learning. In general, every student has a different learning style; some of them are visual learners, while others prefer to learn through audio. Similarly, some students flourish in the classroom, while others are lonely learners who get annoyed by large groups, so they found in distance education a good alternative. Moreover, distance education, can be personalized in many ways, it is the best way to create a perfect learning environment suited to the needs of each student. Distance education allows students to attend classes from any location of their choice instead of being restricted by geographical boundaries. Additionally, online lectures can be recorded, archived, and shared for future reference. The result agreed with (Shearer, 2007) who confirmed that distance education allows teaching to meet the real needs of the individuals, and goes in line with (brain, 2020) who assured that distance learning is flexible with time, learners can learn at their own pace, whenever it is convenient for them which has enabled them to be involved in other activities as well. Furthermore, Distance learning doesn›t need learners to commute to classes every day to attend lectures or lab classes which saves their time and money.

Content domain received the lowest score and ranked last with a mean score of 2.65, (SD .614). This might be due

to the fact that the educational content does not contain enough examples, exercises and duties as is the case of face-to-face education. An alternative is to select a content that is more relevant and allows various subjects to be addressed at the same time through topics that are particularly pertinent and relevant for students in the distance education context. Also, mastering the educational competencies remotely is not equivalent to learning it in the traditional way which suggests that students in their study may be still traditional learners and have not yet resorted to such learning. On the other side, the teacher may not be able to deliver the educational content in an interesting and attractive way.

Analysis of the domains items

In more detail, means and standard deviations of the responses on the items of each domain were calculated as presented in table 5 below:

Table 5 shows that the item *"Receiving continuous feedback"* ranked first with a mean of (4.11) and got a high degree, and this may be due to the ease of communication between the teacher and students, online learning enables direct communication between instructors and students, furthermore, there are no barriers of fear and shyness through online teaching. This result is consistent with (Borup, 2016), who explored the great role of parents in encouraging students to communicate with teachers, and indicated that low-performing students felt very shy and afraid to communicate with them. This concluded fact is also consistent with the findings of (Ahmed & Othman, 2020) which indicate that the learners in the experimental group developed a positive attitude towards the use of virtual classrooms and they were more involved and motivated for distance learning compared to their counterparts in the control group.

The item "*Fewer behavioral offences in distance education compared to face-to-face education*" ranked second with a mean score of 3.91. This could be explained through physical distancing which helped to control students' behaviors when learning remotely. This goes in line with the study of (Borup, 2016), which shed the light on the great role of parental involvement in their children motivation towards education, setting high expectations, and turning them into success, getting them fully involved in online learning, which necessarily leads to fewer behavioral problems.

The item *"Learning educational competencies remotely is equivalent to learning them traditionally"* received the lowest score and ranked last with a mean score of 1.57. The result might be attributed to the fact that students' prefer personal education over distance learning. While some students are thriving with this way of learning, many of them don't seem to be engaging in it. Some students may not be present at all. Others may be in attendance, but they aren't turning in work or doing more than the bare minimum. However, and according to (Loeb, 2020), online learning in general is not as effective as an in-person study, but it is undoubtedly better than nothing.

Table 5: means and standard deviations scores for the responses on each domain:

Domain	*Item*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Degree*	*Rank*
Communication	Fewer behavioral offences in distance education compared to face-to-face education	3.91	1.065	High	2
	Clarity of course site instructions	3.74	1.061	High	5
	Internet technical difficulties took time to solve.	2.53	1.275	Medium	14
Content	The educational content contains examples, exercises and assignments	3.83	1.090	High	4
	Delivering educational content in an interesting and attractive way	2.56	1.258	Medium	13
	Learning educational competencies remotely is equivalent to learning them traditionally.	1.57	.888	Low	15
Teaching	Distance teaching is more beneficial than face-to-face teaching.	3.05	1.389	Medium	10
	I need more time in distance education compared to face- to-face education.	3.73	1.294	High	6
	The need for support is more in distance education compared to face- to-face education.	3.70	1.062	High	7
Interaction	Discussion is easier through distance education compared to face-to-face education	3.57	1.189	Medium	8
	carrying out group activities easily	2.86	1.361	Medium	12
	Distance education motivated me more than face- to-face education.	2.92	1.315	Medium	11
Assessment	Distance evaluation is more flexible compared to face- to-face education.	3.90	1.149	High	3
	Using appropriate and varied evaluation methods	3.54	1.291	Medium	9
	Receiving continuous feedback.	4.11	.934	High	1

Table 6: Students' responses on the domains of the instrument according to gender variable

Domain	*Gender*	n	*Mean*	*SD*
Communication	Males	143	3.38	.575
	Females	211	3.40	.759
Content	Males	143	2.59	.634
	Females	211	2.70	.596
Teaching	Males	143	3.47	.725
	Females	211	3.51	.723
Interaction	Males	143	2.72	.807
	Females	211	3.39	.810
assessment	Males	143	3.83	.574
	Females	211	3.87	.708
Total domain	Males	143	3.20	.367
	Females	211	3.37	.330

Table 7: Results of T-test for the effect of gender on students' responses to the domains of the instrument

Domain	*Mean differences*	*T*	*Df*	*Siq*
Communication	-.018	-.243	352	.809
Content	-.117	-1.769	352	.078
Teaching	-.038	-.483	352	.630
Interaction	-.665	-7.592	352	.000
Assessment	-.043	-.603	352	.547
Total domain	-.176	-4.710	352	.000

Results of the second research question

The second research question sought whether students' evaluation of distance education differ according to gender. To answer this question; means and standard deviations of the students' responses on the domains of the instrument were calculated according to gender variable, as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6 shows apparent differences in mean scores according to gender, and to determine their effect, t-test was performed, as shown in Table 7**.**

Table 7 shows that there are statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.5$) in students' average responses attributed to gender in the interaction domain. T-ratio for gender factor is - 7.592 which is significant in favor of females. Also, there are statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.5$) in students' average responses attributed to gender in the total domains. T ratio reached -4.710 which is significant and in favor of females too.

This may be attributed to that female students are more interactive than male students. The female students showed a tendency towards computers and mobile communication devices more than their male counterparts, they also showed more interest in technology use and hold more positive attitudes towards computing than the male respondents. This may be due to the nature of females who tend to stay at home, unlike males who prefer to spend their time outside. The results agree with the study of (Al-Badri & Al-Kindi, 2019), which indicated that female students are more eager to receive and abide by instructions than male students.

On the other hand, there were no statistically significant differences in the students' average responses in the (communication, content, teaching, assessment) domains due to gender, which means that the responses on the previous domains were homogeneous with respect to gender.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the average response of students' evaluation of distance education experience in public schools in light of COVID-19 was medium. With regard to the domains of the study, the assessment domain ranked first while the content domain received the lowest score and ranked last. The results also indicated that there are statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.5$) in students' average responses attributed to gender in the interaction domain and the domains as a whole, while there are no statistically significant differences in the (communication, content, teaching, assessment) domains due to gender.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the current study, the researchers recommend the following:

For teachers

- Using diversified teaching strategies and catering for individual differences.
- Employing a single teaching strategy may not be suitable for a large number of students who differ from each other and differ in their preferred mode of learning, abilities, and intelligence. Digital skills are not distributed evenly among students and not all of them will have the required knowledge or understanding to get the most out of distance education. Some students need more time in distance education compared to physical classroom setting.
- Enhancing the content in distance education with sufficient examples, exercises and assignments, as in traditional education.
- Delivering the educational content in an interesting and attractive way.
- Reducing the amount of homework assigned to students in order not to be overburdened, and focus on activities that are related to core competencies of the curriculum.
- Designing comprehensive and flexible treatments to enhance learners' different aspects, not just their academic achievement.
- Preventing or minimizing student dropout; by designing appropriate learning situations for them.
- Reconsidering evaluation methods and including it in all educational processes.
- Focusing on higher-order thinking skills, using the shuffle option in the test as well as one by one display of the question and setting time limit.

Educational departments

- The final exam must be administered in person.
- Implementing visually and electronically monitored tests.
- Overcoming technical and technological difficulties.
- Returning to in-person or blended education, this in turn will contribute to supporting students in catching up on lost learning.
- Creating strategies to support students as they work to make up unfinished learning, improving the educational digital structure, which works to activate electronic platforms, and digital content.

Researchers

- Conducting further research to identify the reality of distance education in secondary and lower basic schools.
- Conducting more research to identify the reality of distance in low-income areas which less likely to have a computing devices or adequate internet access.

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