Pre-School Teachers' Views on Distance Education as a Part Of Teaching In The Future

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Abstract The pandemic COVID - 19 affected education, while modern education is still relevant along with educational technologies. Education was delivered through distance learning as face-to-face teaching was not possible during the pandemic. The aim of this paper is to analyse the views of pre-school teachers about distance education as part of teaching in the future. For this purpose, a phenomenological study is conducted using semi-structured interview forms to obtain qualitative data. 10 preschool teachers working in a government preschool in İzmir city, Karabağlar district, participated in this research. All the interviewed preschool teachers participated in the distance learning programme. For data analysis, the content analysis method was used and interpretation through direct quotations is used in different parts of this article. Direct quotes are used to support the findings. The results of this analysis show that distance education has a primarily positive impact on the use of educational technologies and professional development. Although teachers initially believed that distance education was inadequate, they later concluded that it offered them the opportunity to improve. Proposals for distance education were developed based on this research.

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1   Introduction

Considering modern education approach, student-centered education took the place of sage-on-a-stage approach. Through this new approach, the focus became to convey knowledge, skills, and qualifications that needs to be internalized by the students according to students' individual differences, interests, abilities, individual learning methods, and pace. Teacher plays a role in guiding and supervision (Alpar et al., 2007).Teacher should present the structure of the learning process flexible, various, and prosperous; They need to fulfill the process of education in traditional schools and classrooms, as well as they should make it possible education for students in every part of life by arranging and controlling. The changes in acquiring and accessibility to knowledge caused the changes in educational qualifications. Changes such as, accessing knowledge fast, productivity and efficiency, student groups' number, quality, and expectations has affected modern education approach. These factors that affects education approach support developing educational technology. In today's world technological developments offer new opportunities and vary settings and methods for learners and instructors (Alkan, 1990;).

Educational technology has entered our lives in order to troubleshoot the issues and needs together with modern education approach. Instructor and technology have become two significant elements for the learner. Educational technologies are used in mass education and individual education; textbooks, computer, internet, television, video recordings are among educational technology products (Alpar et al., 2007).

Developments in educational technologies accelerated on account of COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has caused problems in health, economy, psychology, education all around the world. COVID-19 pandemic forced traditional education system into a fast change (Saltürk & Güngör, 2020).

COVID-19 virus caused schools to be closed around the world. Education of 1.6 billion students, approximately 90% of the world's student population of all education levels, were interrupted. (Akın & Aslan, 2021). The change started when all around the world schools started to close at the beginning of the pandemic. Face-to-face education gave its place to alternative solutions because of the ambiguity

about going back to normal life (Saltürk & Güngör, 2020). How to convey knowledge, skills, and teaching has become more important.

After the first case which was seen on 11 March 2020 in Turkey, education in all grades were interrupted for a short while from 16th of March 2020 to 30th March 2020. Within the scope of open and distance education applications, it was decided that education would continue through three television channels and Education Information Network (EBA). A new decision was made on 29 April 2020 and the break was extended until 31st May 2020 because the course of pandemic had not changed. At first, higher education was interrupted on 12 March 2020. Later, it was decided that 2019-2020 education year should continue through open and distance education from 23 March 2020 to at the end of spring term (Can, 2020).

Although there were some attempts to produce different alternatives, distance education became one of the most preferred solutions to face-to-face education around the world. This situation caught Turkey off guard like all the other countries in the world. However, Turkey quickly started distance education applications (Altıntaş, 2021). UNESCO announced that it would support countries in order to reduce the negative effects of closed schools and to ensure the continuity of education through distance education and also it announced that it would support the countries to take special cautions against disadvantaged groups (Can, 2020). In addition to health measures, world countries decided to switch to distance education in order to prevent students falling down within the bounds of possibility. Online education was not the last resort, instead it became the only resort for the whole world. (Telli et al., 2020).

Before the pandemic, distance education was used as a part of lifelong learning. The term "distance education" firstly appeared in Wisconsin University's catalogue in 1892 and in 1906 it was used in an article by William Light who was the director of the university (Horzum et al., 2013). In the year of 1833, it came to light when a Swedish newspaper announced that it would give a written lecture though a letter and firstly in England distance education started when Isaac Pitman began teaching with letters in 1840 (Horzum et al.). Since 2000s distance education's reach has expanded and became widespread.

In Turkiye, Ankara University made distance education happen when it first started to teach the bankers through letters in 1965 (Horzum et al., 2013).

From past to present the concept of distance education developed thanks to developments in technology and implementation methods. Instead of distance education term open education, internet-based learning e-learning, virtual learning and computer-based learning terms started to be used (Gökbulut, 2021; 163). In distance education through asynchronous and synchronous teaching teacher and the student can be in different places. In today's world distance education can be changed and differentiated according to the needs of the instructors and learners. There are myriad of definitions of distance education in literature.

All the things considered distance education is defined as a teaching method based on active usage of information technologies to teach lessons and make it easier to learn since learners and instructors are in different times and locations (Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020). According to another definition, distance education is defined as a teaching method in which learners and instructors are independent, far away, and separate from each other for the most of the learning-teaching process and documents and materials that are used are mostly appropriate for the content of the lesson (Özdoğan, Berkant, 2020). Distance education is a learning or teaching model, in which instructor and learner interact with each other using communication technologies independent of time and place (Kurnaz et al., 2020; Rai & Basnet, 2021). It is understood from the two definitions, the most crucial point in distance education is that source and recipient are in different locations and active usage of information technologies (Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020).

Even though there are some different definitions, the main goal is to bring together learners and instructors in different places, to eliminate the drawbacks which cause the education to not occur, to offer an education system that can adapt to science and technology and can benefit the learner without being affected by time and palace (Kaçan & Gelen, 2020).

After compulsory distance education started in Turkiye, during COVID-19 pandemic teachers started to send homework, worksheets, and activities through applications such as Telegram, WhatsApp.

Since 23 March 2020 Ministry of Education (MEB, 2020a) made the lessons possible through EBA (Education Information Network) and TRT television channel. Teachers used applications that supply online platforms from the basic education level to the higher education level in their education processes.

Ministry of Education announced that it would start compensation lessons via Education Information Network and TRT (television channel) by changing weekly course schedules. Over 20 million student and one million teachers switched to distance education in Turkey. In this process, we tried to enable the durability of education with distance education, which we were caught off guard and did not have sufficient and necessary information. Although it was limited, free internet service was provided by the Ministry of Education for pupils who want to access EBA (internet network) (Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020). Furthermore, online/live lessons took the place of them when all these implementations were not enough to proceed the education efficiently.

Online/live lessons became compulsory for each teacher with the start of 2020-2021 education period. In accordance with the weekly course schedule, every teacher started online lessons through EBA or applications like Zoom. However, being unprepared for online lessons brought some problems (Yüksel, 2021).

Even though face-to-face education started again in 2022-2023 education year, distance education became one of the irreplaceable tools in education. It continued to be used commonly for the education of individuals at all levels of education, pupils, teachers, administrators, and parents.

In this circumstance, the aim of this research is to analyze the thoughts of teachers regarding distance education in Turkey, to find out the challenges experienced by teachers in the process, to evaluate the effects of distance education on teaching profession in the light of the effects of the pandemic process and technological developments. Thus, the paper aims to make suggestions to improve the potencies in distance education.

The main problem of this work is identified as 'What are the views and thoughts of preschool teachers about distance education?'

The subproblems of this research can be listed as following questions:

1.   What are the situations of preschool teachers when it comes to distance education?
2.   What are the problems of preschool teachers encountered during distance education?
3.   What are the thoughts of preschool teachers about the teaching process during distance education?
4.   What are the suggestions of preschool teachers on effective and productive conduct of the distance education process?

2   Method

2.1   Research Model

The research was carried out with the phenomenology pattern, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is a method that zeroes in on evaluating personal experience. The aim of phenomenological studies is to uncover a more general understanding of the phenomenon or situation by studying the personal experiences of the participants regarding a phenomenon or situation (The phenomenology design was used while focusing on the phenomenon which we do not have through and detailed information. Phenomenology primarily tries to describe the world experienced by individuals and to explain the quintessence of experiences to explore the common meanings underlying the phenomenon (Ünal & Bulunuz, 2020). In this paper, the phenomenology method was selected in order to try to comprehend deeply the experiences of preschool teachers in distance education. Accordingly, themes and codes were formed and content analysis was carried out.

2.2   Participants

Appropriate sampling method was used in this research. The participants consist of 10 preschool teachers who work at a state preschool in the town of İzmir's Karabağlar district.

Information regarding the descriptive features of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Information regarding the descriptive features of the participants

Gender	Frequency
Female	10
Age	
25 to 30	2
31 to 41	5
41 to 50	3
Years of service	
6 to 10 Years	3
11 to 15 Years	5
16 to 20 Years	2
Type of school that worked	
State School	10
Status of participating in in-service training on distance education	
Yes	1
No	9
Have an internet connection at home	
Yes	9
No	1
Possession of a personal computer	
Yes	9
No	1

When Table 1 is considered, there are 10 female participants while there are no male participants. The age range of the participants changes from 25 to 60. Participants with 6 to 10 years of service are 3, participants with 11 to 15 years are 5, and participants with 16 to 20 years are 2 people. Ten of the participants work in state schools. While only 1 person received in-service training on distance education, 9 people did not receive it on this topic. Besides, while 9 participants have personal computers, 1 participant does not have a personal computer. All 10 participants have internet connection at their house.

2.3   Data Collection

Data is generally obtained through interviews in phenomenological research (Yıldırım,Şimşek, 2013). In this research, data is obtained through semi-structured interview forms. The interview form is created by the researcher. Expert opinion in the field of pedagogy was considered. As a pilot experiment, the form prepared before the study was sent to two preschool teachers and in this way applicability of

the form was tested. At the end of the pilot experiment, the form was finalized by making corrections and additions to materials.

Interview form consists of 5 parts. In the first part, the participants were asked for information about their descriptive features. In the second part, questions about the difficulties encountered by preschool teachers in distance education process are covered. In the third part, the question about preschool teachers' thoughts on teaching during distance education is asked. In the fourth part, the question about preschool teachers' views on teaching profession while they gave distance education is asked. In the fifth part, the question about the suggestions of preschool teachers regarding effective and productive conduct of distance education process is asked. The interview form is attached to the paper.

In order to collect the data of the research, the interview form was prepared and delivered by hand to the preschool teachers, and they were required to write the answers themselves. The data were obtained through answering the questions by the preschool teachers who volunteered to participate in the research. Data were collected in April 2021.

2.4   Data Analysis

Quotations were taken from the answers given by the participants by using the content analysis method in the analysis of the data. Before the analysis, the answers given to the interview form were photocopied and each form was named (such as K1, K2, K3…) and the answers given were grouped under the question headings. Themes were formed according to the research questions. Next, the answers given by the participants were grouped according to their similarities and differences. The analysis was completed through generating codes from the answers given by the participants.

2.5   Validity and Reliability

Preschool teachers (2) and field experts (1) examined the questions in the interview form and determined that the form had content validity. 2 researchers worked together and came to an agreement in the content analysis. Direct quotations are used, the process is explained in detail. All interview data is preserved.

2.6   Limitations

This research was carried out with 10 preschool teachers working in preschool in town of Izmir Karabaglar district, Turkiye. The research is a qualitative research based on the views of preschool teachers on distance education.

3   Findings

The findings obtained from the questions asked to the preschool teachers were analyzed in 4 parts based on the problems of the research.

Prior Knowledge of Preschool Teachers About Distance Education

Preschool teachers were asked whether they knew what distance education is before the COVID-19 pandemic, and if they had prior knowledge on the topic. Moreover, they were asked to write examples of distance education they were aware of. Teachers gave one or more examples to the question. The answers given by the teachers were coded and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Prior knowledge of preschool teachers about distance education

Main Theme	Answers	Codes
Information about distance education	I have prior knowledge about distance education (3) I do not have prior knowledge about distance education (7)	Letter (1) Online(2)

When Table 2 is considered, it is seen that 7 of the preschool teachers do not have any prior knowledge about distance education, and 3 teachers have prior knowledge about distance education. When teachers who had prior knowledge about distance education were asked to write examples of distance education, it was spotted that teachers gave Letter (1), Online (2) examples.

The Problems Preschool Teachers Experienced During Distance Education

Initially, within the framework of the research, it was asked whether the preschool teachers did distance education or not. Ten of the teachers said that they do preschool activities through distance education. Moreover, it was asked whether the

preschool teachers had problems in the distance education process or not. The codes were formed through theming the answers given by the teachers and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The problems preschool teachers experienced during distance education

Main Theme	Answers	Codes
Problems with computers and Wi-Fi connections	I had problems (10)	Wi-Fi connection (6) Slow Wi-Fi connection (4) Not knowing the applications (4) Overcrowded application systems (5)
Problems with students	I had problems (10)	Students cannot access internet/computer (4) Low attendance (5) Students have low motivation and reluctance (5) Students have short attention spans (4) Students have to use the internet/computer under adult supervision (3)

When Table 3 is considered, it is seen that preschool teachers have problems with Wi-Fi connection (6), high Wi-Fi density (5), not knowing how to use distance education applications (4). Teacher K1 said, "During the lectures, I had connection problems because of high intensity. We could not properly connect to EBA most of the time," Teacher K3 stated, "I had problems with voice transmission because of Wi-Fi connection. Also, I have never used programs such as Zoom before. I understood the programs by experiencing them, which took some time." K10 teacher told, "I had stress during the comprehending phase of "EBA/Zoom" because it was a program, we did not know anything about. I had difficulty connecting most of the time because of the high-density connection during lecture hours." Teacher K6 said, "I had problems with the internet, there was a high-density. I had constant disconnections during the lecture." They gave these answers.

The problems of preschool teachers with students in the distance education process; students' inability to access the internet/computer (4), low participation in lessons (6), students have low motivation/reluctance (5), short attention spans of students (4), students having to use the internet/computer under adult supervision (3). Teachers stated these problems. Teacher K2 told, "It was very challenging to keep the students in front of the screen. They had connection problems. It took some time to learn class definitions and live class participation in EBA. I had difficulty in guiding some of my students from a distance." Teacher K3 said "I had to teach lessons in the evenings because pupils' parents were working, especially children

with short attention spans had problems focusing on that time. When I thought the lesson during the daytime, the participation was very low." Teacher K4 told "Children could not attend the lessons because they could not use the computer themselves and the families went to work. Generally, they were with their grandparents, and they could not help the children technologically. Teacher K8 stated "When we consider the attention span of the age group, I observed that the students were bored in front of the screen. While children's participation was higher at first, participation and desire diminished day by day." Teacher K9 "Since I had a lot of parents working, I had to arrange the hours of the lesson during evening hours for computer use. In those hours students were reluctant to attend the class." They expressed their problems.

Preschool Teachers' Views on Teaching During Distance Education

Preschool teachers were asked questions about their views on the teaching during the distance education. The codes were formed by theming the answers. When Table 4 is considered, it is seen that the most used teaching methods by preschool teachers in the distance education process; return demonstration (10), and video (10). Teacher K1 said, "At the beginning of the process, I made activity assignments through EBA. Later, TRT Kindergarten channel went on the air. We played finger games via WhatsApp video calls. Teacher K2 stated "When I had connection problems and communicating with parents, I taught my lessons through WhatsApp. I made video calls. If we do not have a connection problem, I performed my live lessons via EBA. I taught my live lessons especially with question-answer, return demonstration and video sharing methods. I read stories with presentations. I played games together with videos. We filled our workbooks through their own web applications. I gave them worksheets to do with their families." Teacher K9 replied "I sent activities via EBA. Through communicating parents, I gave homework. I recorded videos and told how to do it. I sent practice samples from YouTube.

Preschool teachers use in the process of distance education; daily course plans (2), Documents (presentation, book etc.) (4), Web applications (z-book etc.) (2), EBA lesson content (7), videos (10) as teaching materials.

Table 4: Preschool Teachers' Views on Teaching During Distance Education

Main Theme	Subtheme	Answers	Codes
Method	Methods used in the lessons during distance education	There is answer (10)	Questions-Answers (1) Video (10) PowerPoint Presentation (1) Return Demonstration (10) Hands-on activities (2) Sending worksheet through EBA (10)
Material	Materials used in the lessons during distance education	There is answer (10)	Documents (presentation, book etc.) (4) EBA lesson content (7) Video (10) Paper, pencil (2) Daily course plan (2)
Lesson Duration	Lesson duration during distance education (minutes)	No answer (7)	1 to 30 minutes (2) 31 to 60 minutes (1)
Environment	Environment of distance education	No answer (7)	Comfortable (1) Safe (1) Optimal (1)
Applications used	Applications and platforms through distance education is carried out	There is answer (10)	WhatsApp (10) Online lesson (10) EBA (10)

When Table 4 is considered, it is seen that preschool teachers mostly complete 1 lesson between 1-30 minutes in the distance education process. They explained that it was not convenient for the attention span of the students to hold lessons for 2 hours consecutively. Teacher K1 "30 minutes was convenient for 1 lesson. Too many lesson hours caused boredom and distraction." Teacher K3 answered, 'It was very convenient for the lessons to take a maximum of 30 minutes and it was adequate for the children. Moreover, preschool teachers expressed that they thought their distance education from home and stated that this environment was comfortable (1), safe (1) and optimal (1). Teacher K5 replied, "Since it is too hard to keep students of this age group in front of the screen and perform activities, I have arranged an average of 20 minutes of activity. We thought lessons at home in a more comfortable environment. It made me feel safe during the epidemic."

Thoughts of Preschool Teachers on Teaching Profession in the Process of Distance Education

Preschool teachers' thoughts on the teaching profession during the extended education process were studied. Thus, themes were formed, and coding was done. The themes and codes formed are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Thoughts of preschool teachers on teaching profession in the process of distance education

Main Theme	Answers	Codes
Usage of Educational Technologies	No answer (1)	Increase in technology usage (8) Starting to use online programs (8) Discovering different programs (4)
Concern	No answer (5)	Being unhappy (4) Feeling inadequate during distance education (5) Feeling of inefficiency (1) Fear (2) Feeling of emptiness (2)
Job satisfaction	No answer (1)	Feeling of inefficiency (2) Lack of face-to-face teaching (5) Inability to communicate with students (3)
Career development	No answer (1)	Opportunity to improve oneself (9)

When Table 5 is considered, it is seen that preschool teachers' distance education process have a positive effect on the usage of educational technologies. During distance education process of preschool teachers, they explained that the use of technology increased (8), starting to use online platforms when not regularly using them (8) and discovering different programs (4). Teacher K4 said, "It made new contributions to my profession. I had a limited relationship with technology, which increased after the distance education process in the pandemic. I used programs that I have never used before. We discovered the programs together with my friends and students." Teacher K7 "There were positive benefits such as the increase in the use of technology, more use of internet platforms and in the meantime learning new programs." Teacher K9 answered, "It has positively affected my use of computer programs that I was not aware before."

It is seen in Table 5 that inability to teach in the classroom environment causes anxiety in half of the preschool teachers and their job satisfaction is negatively affected. While the causes of anxiety are expressed as being unhappy (4), feeling

inadequate during distance education (5), fear (2), feeling of emptiness (2), feeling of inefficiency (1), preschool teachers whose job satisfaction is negatively affected; They stated the reasons as feeling of inefficiency (2), lack of face-to-face education (5), and inability to communicate with students (3). Furthermore, it was uncovered that 9 of the preschool teachers had a positive effect on their career development. Hence, they stated that they had the opportunity to develop themselves (9).

Teacher K1 said, "While I was encountered with practices that I had never encountered before regarding my profession the fact that teachers were presented as doing nothing all the time made me feel very uneasy and unhappy. When I was already anxious during this time, I sometimes felt unworthy professionally. Especially at first, I thought that I was not qualified for my students." Teacher K8 stated "I felt inadequate about the lack of information that may happen for students who are living in poverty and the inability to reach them. The process and all these developments were not familiar even for us. I watched videos on YouTube. I joined in-service trainings." Teacher K7 explained "The anxiety I experienced during the epidemic, the sayings on social media that showed the teacher as worthless and useless, and the inability to communicate enough with the students negatively affected me."

Suggestions of Preschool Teachers on Effective and Productive Conduct of Distance Education Process

Table 6: Suggestions of Preschool Teachers on Effective and Productive Conduct of Distance Education Process

Main Theme	Answers	Codes
Educational Technologies	No answer (1)	Providing computer and free Wi-Fi access to all students (6) Providing equal opportunity (3) Establishing standards (3)
Material	No answer (1)	Providing material/document support and diversity (8) Common distance education programs (1)
Education	No answer (3)	Providing guidance for parents (6) Arranging teacher trainings (1)

When Table 6 and suggestions of preschool teachers on effective and productive conduct of distance education process are considered, it is seen that the most prominent common opinions under the themes of educational technologies,

materials and education are; providing computer and free Wi-Fi access to all students (6), providing material/document support and diversity (8), and providing guidance to parents (6) Teacher K1explained "It seems to me that free internet access should be provided to students without internet access, and parents should be guided and participate in some way." Teacher K2 said, "For online fun games and activities, teachers need to be trained or do research to improve themselves somehow." Teacher K4 stated "First of all, the internet infrastructure must be solid. Parents should be made more knowledgeable and eager. It is a process that the family and the teacher should act together and carry out with a mutual discipline. Teacher K7 told "It is crucial to provide equal opportunity in education. In my opinion, in order to be effective and efficient, there should be certain standards at all levels. Like it was prepared in face-to-face education, it can be done by preparing a distance education program with an expert staff and distributing it to all students and teachers with the documents, computers, and tablet programs that will support this program, and providing free Wi-Fi access.

4   Conclusion and Discussion

In this research, the views of preschool teachers on the distance education process were tried to be explained. It is seen that distance education, which is a process that necessitates the adoption of different understandings from the methods used in classical classroom teaching and learning environments, is a more flexible model that leaves the responsibility to the individual and ensures personalized learning with it.

It is known that teachers who went through the distance education model one-to-one during the pandemic process cannot get the productivity and effectiveness of face-to-face education in the distance education process.

It was observed that most of the teachers did not have prior knowledge about the pandemic and distance education before the COVID -19 pandemic. The lack of distance education experiences of teachers and students before the COVID-19 pandemic, the inadequacy of the infrastructure and unawareness they encountered in connection with the technology they were exposed to deal with it in the process and it brought along many difficulties.

It is seen that teachers have the standpoint that it is challenging to teach preschool children with distance education. Furthermore, it was expressed by the teachers that they did not reach all students in the process and that there was no equality of opportunity. Başaran, Doğan, Karaoğlu & Şahin (2020), It has been determined that the negativities brought by distance education are the limited interaction, the inability of the students to participate in the lesson actively, the fact that distance education is not convenient for individual differences and there are problems about entering the lesson because of technical problems experienced. All teaching and learning individuals expressed that they had problems with technology access and lack of knowledge. It is stated that being unable to access internet is a very common problem in distance education (Serçemeli, Kurnaz, 2020).

It has been observed that preschool children also encounter with problems like needing for an adult for computer and internet access. The fact that the parents are at work and reluctant parents are other problems. Teachers expressed that they felt inadequate and worthless. The decrease in face-to-face communication and interaction is among the limitations of distance education (Altun Ekiz, 2020; Karakuş vd, 2020).

Teachers preferred EBA and Zoom programs during the distance education process, and they also tried to follow up and give feedback with WhatsApp. It is known that applications such as WhatsApp are used for purposes such as homework sharing, communication with parents, and announcements during face-to-face education process.

It has been observed that the rate of participation in in-service trainings for career development of teachers has increased and they have gained knowledge, skills and experience related to technology.

It has been observed that they prefer hands-on activities for online lessons, where they choose teaching methods such as return demonstration, video, question-answer during distance education. The short attention span of the children of this age group is among the factors that make the distance education process challenging.

With COVID-19 pandemic, it has become a significant necessity to continue the distance education method, which has been actively used in all education levels, in a qualified manner. If the problems and deficiencies regarding the distance education process are not resolved as soon as possible, the students who will be studying in the coming years may be equipped with inadequate, lack and incorrect information. It is crucial to take precautions regarding the distance education process immediately.

Based on the results of the research, some suggestions are made for the researchers:

– The participants of this research were pre-school teachers works at kindergartens. It is expected that research will be done on preschool teachers in kindergartens.
– With the transition to distance education, it is necessary to study how the education process in Turkey is affected at all grades and levels.
– It is crucial to examine how distance education activities affect all teaching and learning individuals positively or negatively.
– Various trainings on distance education, technology access and usage should be organized for teachers.

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