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Research and Trends for Educators, Staff and Administrators in Distance Education: Content Analysis of Distance Education Journals (2008-2018)

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Abstract: This study examines the research trends and gaps of educators, staff, and administrators in distance education articles from 2008 to 2018. Ten peer-reviewed journals were selected from the Scimago Journal & Country Rank portal, and 3504 articles in the journals were scanned. Four hundred sixty-one of them were analyzed using document review methodology through content analysis concerning various criteria (keywords, role names, research variables, design, sample size, etc.). The analysis revealed the following: (i) few studies have focused on educators, staff, and administrators in the last decade, and there has been little focus on the experiences of administrators (ii) they have mainly focused on the role of the teacher, professional development, quality, and professional qualifications (iii) regional interest shows, that the USA, China, and the U.K. are the leading countries (iv) The qualitative research method was primarily used and interview, as a data collection method was most preferred qualitative data mainly, was analyzed using content analysis (vi) The research samples are generally small (< 50). The findings based on the increasing research trends related to educators, staff, and administrators lead to the emergence of potential research areas and the design of distance education strategies. The study also provides directions for future research.

Keywords: Distance education, educator, distance education staff, distance education administrator, research trend.

Highlights

What is already known about this topic:

- There were not enough studies in the distance education process with other stakeholders than students.
- No comprehensive analysis was found that examined the studies on educators, staff, and administrators in distance education.
- In the literature, several studies focus specifically on faculty, staff, and administrative groups in distance education.

What this paper adds:

- To identify the research trends and gaps in distance education from 2008 to 2018.
- Focused on educator, staff, and administrator.
- Few studies related to educator, staff, and administrator in the last decade.
- Mostly focused on professional development and qualifications and instructor roles.

The implications of the presented paper for practice and/or policy are as follows:

- Considering the distance education activities that have increased exponentially due to the pandemic COVID -19 and the workload of educators, staff, and administrators involved in distance education further research before the pandemic could make distance education activities more efficient during the pandemic era.
- Mainly suggest that different sample groups and different variables should be studied.
- Experimental, causal-comparative, and modeling studies must be included in future studies.



Introduction

Although the history of distance education dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, crucial changes in human resources, organization of knowledge, new instructional theories, and techniques have occurred since that time (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). In particular, the rapid development of educational technologies after the 1980s and the student-centered approach to education that emerged after the 1990s led to a redefinition of the positions and pedagogical roles of distance educators and educators in the system (Gomez-Rey et al., 2018; Roberts, 2018). Distance education practices, which were conducted mainly via paper and pencil, mail, radio, and television in the 20th century, have changed exponentially with the advent of the Internet, satellite, and media distribution channels in the 21st century. As 2020 approaches, the roles and responsibilities of educators, staff, and administrators in distance education have increased exponentially.

In general, teachers are responsible for planning, delivering, and assessing instructional activities in distance education and presenting content to students (Arghode et al., 2018). In distance education, teachers are the main actors who determine the quality of the learning and teaching process (Hartnett, 2019), especially their technological and pedagogical skills (Martin et al., 2019). In this regard, Martin et al. (2019) point out five different roles of faculty who teach in online education: Facilitator, Course Designer, Content Manager, Subject Matter Expert, and Mentor. Aydin (2017) emphasizes that educators who teach in distance education should have many competencies that vary depending on the teaching environment, such as interactions with students, assessment and evaluation techniques, and performance records. Studies also point to the importance of communication and feedback that instructors provide with/to students to achieve the goal of distance education and meet students' expectations (Amiryousefi & Geld, 2021; Savvidou, 2018). While Hu and Potter (2012) emphasize that instructors should effectively use technological infrastructure and adapt content to the digital environment, Moore and Kearsley (2012) suggest that instructors should play a role in minimizing the "transactional distance," which refers to the psychological gap between students and instructors, through various teaching techniques and activities. On the other hand, Borup and Stimson (2019) examined the roles and responsibilities of lecturers in the distance education system from three fundamental aspects: (1) organization and design, (2) teaching (3) facilitation.

Colleges and universities worldwide are finding new ways to integrate their schools into the distance and interdisciplinary programs, incorporate a variety of media and teaching techniques, and offer more flexible learning degrees and credit options (Adams-Becker et al., 2018). Although the teacher factor alone is not sufficient to accomplish these practices, it is necessary to focus on the staff and administrators who play a key role in distance education. Although the names of all the stakeholders involved in distance education may vary, it is important to determine the role of these individuals in the effectiveness of the educational processes. For example, McFarlane (2011) adapted the administrative roles established by London Management Center (2010) to distance education, addressing two general frameworks, leadership roles, and administrative responsibilities. The authors explain the leadership role with sub-roles such as the information role (technology leader, information organizer, etc.), the interpersonal role (team and group leader), and the decision-making role (innovator, decision-maker, etc.). They explain the administrative functions in parts such as monitoring, disruption manager, negotiator, and entrepreneur.

The literature contains many studies on the elements/people involved in distance education. However, in examining the studies, it was found that the number of studies that involved faculty, staff, and administrators involved in distance education, as study participants were relatively small. It can be seen that similar results have been obtained in the literature on this topic (Özcan & Yıldırım, 2018; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2017; Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016). In the study conducted for distance education between 2009 and 2013, 861 articles in eight academic journals were reviewed using content analysis (Bozkurt et al., 2015). The study found that academics appeared as participants in 10% of the 861 articles, administrators in 4%, and professionals in 2%. However, it was not stated whether these

individuals were directly involved in distance education. Ozcan and Yildirim (2018) state that no study directly reveals the motivation of administrators concerning academic educational programs offered through distance education. The study that examined 362 experimental studies on MOOCs published between 2008 and 2015 analyzed the articles using content analysis (Bozkurt et al., 2017). It was observed that 8.4% of the areas examined in the study could be directly or indirectly related to the educators, administrators, and staff involved in distance education. The data was collected through interviews that analyzed the perceptions of virtual leadership of the distance education team and involved five teachers, 28 distance education students, and 11 technical support teams (Kuscu & Arslan, 2016). As a result of the study, it was observed that participants' perspectives on virtual leadership differed. All three groups mentioned communication skills, the ability to increase motivation, and technological competence as typical characteristics of virtual leadership.

On the other hand, it was found that there are many studies on students' experiences and opinions of the learning effectiveness in distance education (Cakiroglu et al., 2019; Gökbulut, 2020; Malinovski et al., 2014; Lundqvist et al., 2020). Moreover, most of them have recently increased even more during the COVID 19 pandemic period (Amir et al., 2020; Aristeidou & Cross, 2021; Tümen Akyıldız, 2020). Bozkurt and Zawacki-Richter (2021) conducted a bibliographic analysis on trends and patterns in distance education by using social network analysis and text mining. They found that the most focused points of researchers publishing in distance education journals were student and learning concepts. Similarly, Cakiroglu et al. (2019) found that many studies between 2009 and 2016 focused on the effects of distance education on students.

However, there are also studies in the literature that do not include faculty, administrators, or staff involved in distance education in the research sample but analyze students' opinions about one or more of these individuals (Cho & Cho, 2016; Kara & Can, 2019; Liaw & Huang, 2015; Mahmood et al., 2009). In addition, opinions have been obtained from educators who teach face-to-face (Nascimbeni & Burgos, 2016), experimental studies have been conducted (Coker, 2018), and there are also studies conducted on educators, administrators, and staff in the form of a literature review (Guri-Rosenblit, 2019; Motte, 2013). However, since the number of these studies is limited and there are no similar studies in distance education, their generalizability is low. Moreover, most of these studies were conducted with fewer samples (Kuscu & Arslan, 2016; Richardson et al., 2016).

The Aim and Significance of the Study

In the literature, several studies focus specifically on faculty, staff, and administrative groups in distance education (Bezuidenhout, 2018; Borup et al., 2019; Rienties et al., 2018). The limited number of studies mentioned above address the groups' opinions about distance education, problems, technological competencies, and interaction. On the other hand, there are also analysis studies similar to this study. For example, Bozkurt & Zawacki-Richter (2021) analyzed trends and patterns for past studies in distance education (2014-2019). Lee et al. (2004) aimed to reveal the main themes and general trends used in the articles between 1997-2002. Bozkurt (2019) analyzed the intellectual roots, relevance to general learning theories and structure of distance education by analyzing articles and references. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2009) analyzed the methods, research areas, and authorship patterns of articles on distance education (2000-2008). These analysis studies in the literature aimed to make general and comprehensive inferences from previous research. Our study aims to fill the gap in the literature by specifically addressing three groups together. It also aims to determine the trends in this direction by detailing the various characteristics of the studies. No comprehensive analysis was found that examined the studies on educators, staff, and administrators in distance education. In the light of the above information, the recent study aimed to review the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education and the relevant articles published in distance education journals between 2008 and 2018 and examine their current trends.

Research Questions

In the context of the above aim, the research questions were as below:

1. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by years?
2. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by country?
3. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by their variables?
4. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by their design and methods?
5. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by their keywords?
6. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by role names?
7. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by sample size?
8. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by data collection tools?
9. How is the distribution of the studies conducted for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education by data analysis?

Methodology

Research Design

This study, a systematic review methodology was used to identify the trends of studies for educators, staff, and administrators in distance education and documents analysis and content analysis to reveal findings. The systematic review attempts to identify, describe the relevant research, appraise evidence critically, and synthesize the findings systematically (Gough et al., 2017)

Samples and Analysis

Determinations Journals and Articles

Ten journals were reviewed, and selected articles were analyzed for this study:

- International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning,
- Distance Education,
- Online Learning Journal,
- Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning,
- Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education,
- American Journal of Distance Education,
- Journal of Interactive Online Learning,
- Internet and Higher Education,
- Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning,
- International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies

A five-step process was carried out for identifying journals and articles. The Figure 1 shows the process conducted at this stage.

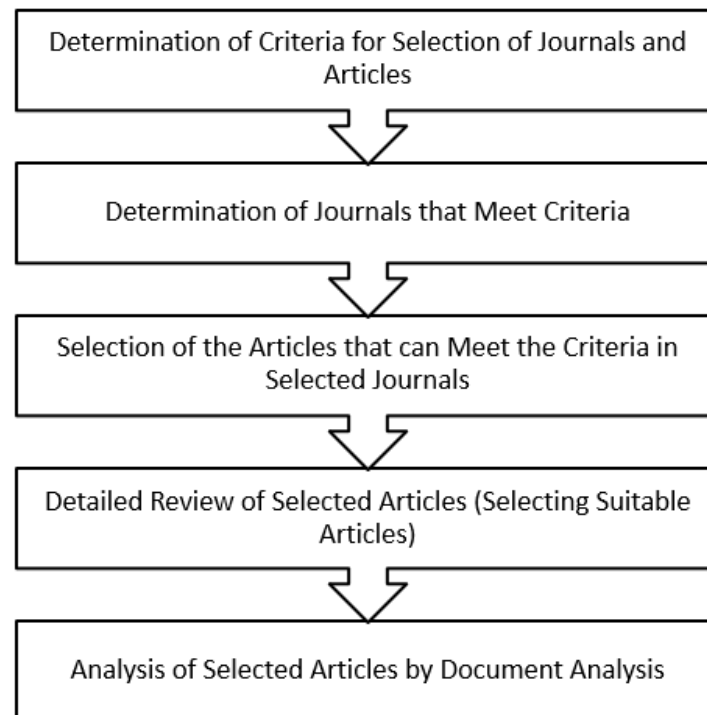


Figure 1. Process of identification of journals and articles

At first, the criteria were determined in identification of journals and articles. At this stage, the journal criteria were determined as being indexed in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR - <https://www.scimagojr.com>), a portal approved by Elsevier's Scopus aiming to measure the prestige of journals (Colledge, et al., 2010), and inclusion of a term about distance education (online learning, open, distance education, distance, e-learning, Internet and web-based learning) in its name. The article criteria were determined as the fact that the study was conducted about educators, staff, and administrators involved in distance education, and these people were participants of the study, and the data collection process was performed with these people. In this context, firstly, all journals that meet the specified criteria (10 Journals) were selected by searching the relevant terms in SJR (Table 1).

Table 1. List of journals that meet the criteria

Journal Code	Journal Name	SJR Q Rank	WoS Q Rank
IRRODL	International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning	Q1	Q1
DE	Distance Education	Q1	Q2
OLJ	Online Learning Journal	Q1	-
OL	Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning	Q1	-
TOJDE	Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education	Q4	-
AJDE	American Journal of Distance Education	Q1	-
JIOL	Journal of Interactive Online Learning	Q2	-
IHE	Internet and Higher Education	Q1	Q1
LISDL	Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning	Q2	-
WLTT	International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies	Q3	-

Once the journals were identified, all the articles (N=3504) published between 01/01/2018 and 31/12/2018 were entered into the computer and subjected to preliminary review according to the set criteria. First, all articles in the review were opened individually, and the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles were examined to determine whether they met the criteria. In the pre-screening phase, all three researchers reviewed all articles individually and placed the articles they felt met the criteria in a separate folder. Then, the researchers compared these articles, and it was found that all three

researchers had selected 448 articles. A preliminary review was again conducted to determine if the 18 articles selected by one or two researchers in addition to these articles met the criteria. It was found that 13 additional articles met the criteria, making 461 articles recorded for the detailed review.

Analysis of Articles

Articles identified during the preliminary review were subjected to content analysis. Content analysis, which generally refers to analyzing texts (transcripts, documents, etc.) rather than observation, is used to reduce and interpret qualitative data to identify underlying consistencies and meanings by drawing on extensive qualitative material (Patton, 2015). Studies (N=353) that were determined not to meet the criteria established within the study during the content analysis of 461 articles were removed from the data set. Following all of these procedures, 108 articles were analyzed from studies conducted with faculty, staff, and administrators in distance education. These individuals were participants in the study and conducted data collection with or focused on these individuals.

In reviewing the articles, a Google Form sheet prepared by the researchers was used. The researchers in a closed internet network used the prepared Google form. The articles were subjected to content analysis concerning the following items:

- Keywords
- Variables
- Role Names
- Research Design
- Location
- Samples/Working Groups
- Data Collection Tools
- Data Analysis
- Suggestions

Reliability

The 461 articles included in the detailed review were randomly divided into 153, 154, and 154. Each researcher took one group of articles and reviewed these articles in detail. In this context, each article was analyzed based on the relevant criteria. As a result of the analysis, the articles that did not meet the study criteria (353 articles) were removed from the dataset. To check the accuracy of this process, 20 articles randomly selected from those extracted from the dataset by one researcher were re-examined by one of the other researchers. At this stage, no faulty process was found.

Each researcher conducted a content analysis of all 108 articles in the dataset individually via Google Forms in the following phase. After completing the analysis process, each researcher reviewed 20 randomly selected articles from the 108 articles and examined the differences (intra-rater reliability) between the results of the two reviews. No difference was found between the results of the three researchers. Then, inter-rater reliability was examined (Stemler, 2000). At this stage, the data entered by the three researchers in Google Forms were compared, and the percentage agreement between the raters was checked. For the percentage agreement, Fleiss's Kappa value (Fleiss, 1971) were calculated. As a result of the calculation, the kappa value was determined as 0.892.

Landis and Koch (1977) found that a kappa value between .81 and 1.00 is almost perfect. Therefore, the kappa values obtained in the study indicate a near-perfect agreement between the raters, and the reliability of the raters could be acceptable.

Findings

The analyzed articles were reported under three main headings: demographic information, research areas and trends for educator, staff and administrator in distance education, and methodology. Results are expressed with figures and tables created via Microsoft Office Excel. For some results, frequency values (f) were used, while numbers of publications (N) were used for others.

Demographic Information

461 articles that were identified following the preliminary review of 3504 articles were subjected to content analysis. During the content analysis, articles that did not meet the study criteria were removed from the data set. At the end of the content analysis, results regarding the 108 articles suitable for the purpose of the study emerged. The Figure 2 gives information on the distribution of the reviewed articles on the basis of journals

Journal Code	Number of Articles	Number of Articles Selected for Preliminary Review	Number of Articles with Content Analysis	Percent(%)
IRRODL	799	158	43	5,38
DE	278	59	17	6,12
OLJ	438	75	13	2,97
OL	197	51	7	3,55
TOJDE	693	35	8	1,15
AJDE	225	10	7	3,11
JJOL	104	25	7	6,73
IHE	352	22	4	1,14
LISDL	219	12	2	0,91
WLTT	199	14	0	0
Total	3504	461	108	3,08
Percent(%)	100	13,16	3,08	

Figure 2. Information on articles

Distribution by Year

When looking at the distribution of articles by year, it can be seen that the articles suitable for the study were published in each year between 2008 and 2018. Although the number of articles does not increase or decrease linearly, it increases in specific periods and decreases in some years. It was found that most of the publications were in 2018 (N=18) and 2016 (N=14). Figure 3 shows the distribution diagram of articles by year.

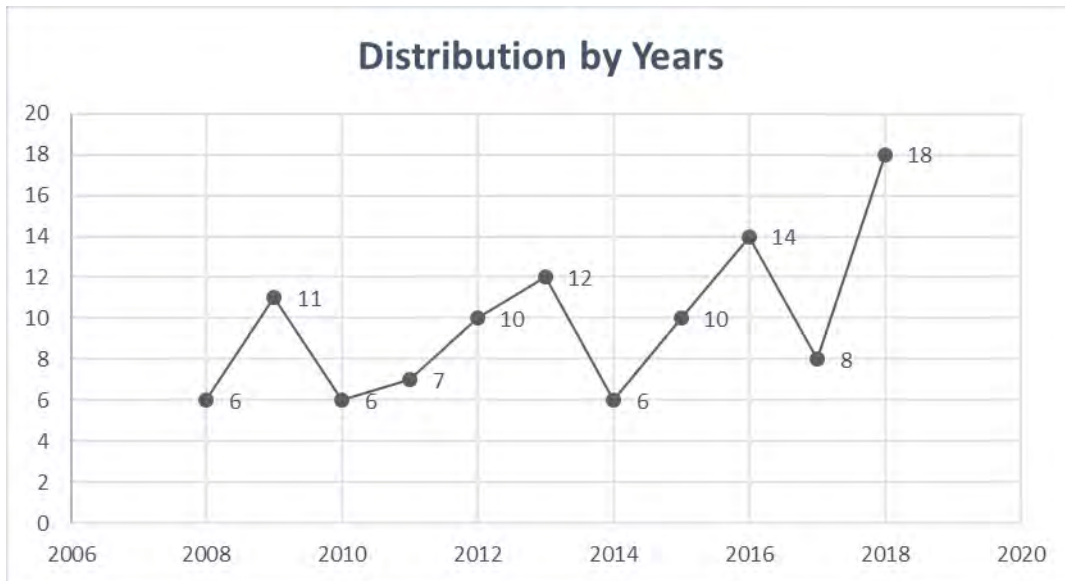


Figure 3. Distribution by years

Country

When the distribution of countries of the study groups in the articles is examined, it is found that there were 41 countries in total (Figure 4). In some studies, data were collected from more than one country, so the country data in the figure are expressed as frequency values ($f_{Total}=152$).

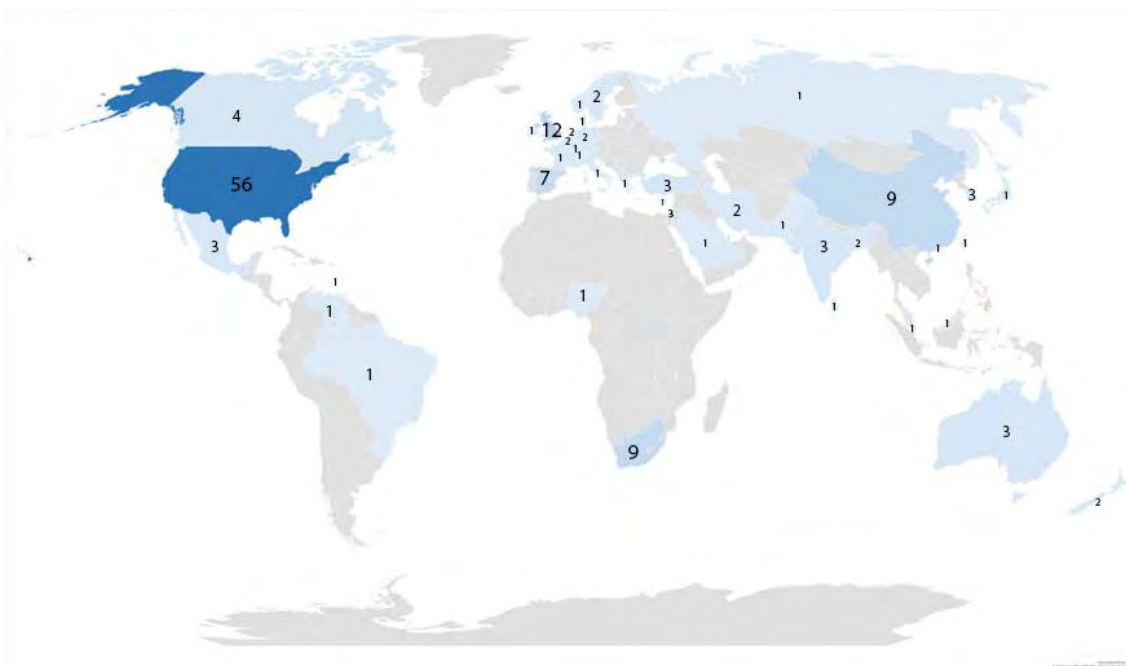


Figure 4. Study countries

Looking at Figure 4, it is clear that the country where the most studies were conducted is the United States. Although there are 41 different countries, 36.8% of the global data collections were conducted in the United States. The U.S. is followed by United Kingdom, China, South Africa, and Spain.

Analysis of Research Areas and Trends for Educator, Staff, and Administrator in Distance Education

Variables

The variables analyzed were determined by analyzing the articles' purpose, problem, sub-objectives, and sub-problems. It was determined that 38 different variables were analyzed. These variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 1. Variables analyzed in studies

Variables	f	Variables	f
Instructor Roles and Qualifications	13	Concerns about Online Education	1
Professional Development	11	Professional Identity Skills of Administrators	1
Quality	5	Online Learning Satisfaction	1
Professional Qualifications	4	Roles of Administrators	1
Open Educational Resources	4	Online Learning Components	1
Social Presence	3	Technology Acceptance Model	1
Tools and Strategies That Increase Interaction	3	Organizational and Administrative Identity	1
Professional Identity	2	Organizational Elements	1
Components That Improve Learning Performance	2	Factors of Affecting Administrative Decisions	1
Attitude to Distance/Online Education	2	Organizational commitment	1
Cognitive Presence	2	Professional Satisfaction	1
Assessment Methods and Approaches	2	Program Satisfaction	1
Effective Pedagogical Applications	2	Instructor Based Elements in Evaluation	1
Student Interaction and Participation	2	Teacher-Student Interaction	1
Pedagogical Strategies	1	Course Components in Distance Education	1
Transactional Distance	1	Wikis Use	1
Challenges for Instructors	1	Motivation for Online Programs	1
Effectiveness of Teleconference	1	Intention to Use Digital Learning Materials	1
Evaluation Designs in Distance Education	1	Technical and Communicative Difficulties	1

As shown in Table 3, educator roles, qualifications, and professional development were the most frequently analyzed variables. In addition, the variables of quality and professional qualifications were also frequently analyzed. Looking at the variables frequently analyzed in the articles, it can be said that quality is the main theme.

Keywords

Among the keywords used in the articles, those that are suitable for the study were analyzed. The number of suitable keywords among the 108 studies was 67. The number of unique keywords among these keywords was 63. In 60 articles, no suitable keywords were found, or no keyword was used. Figure 5 shows the results of the keyword analysis.

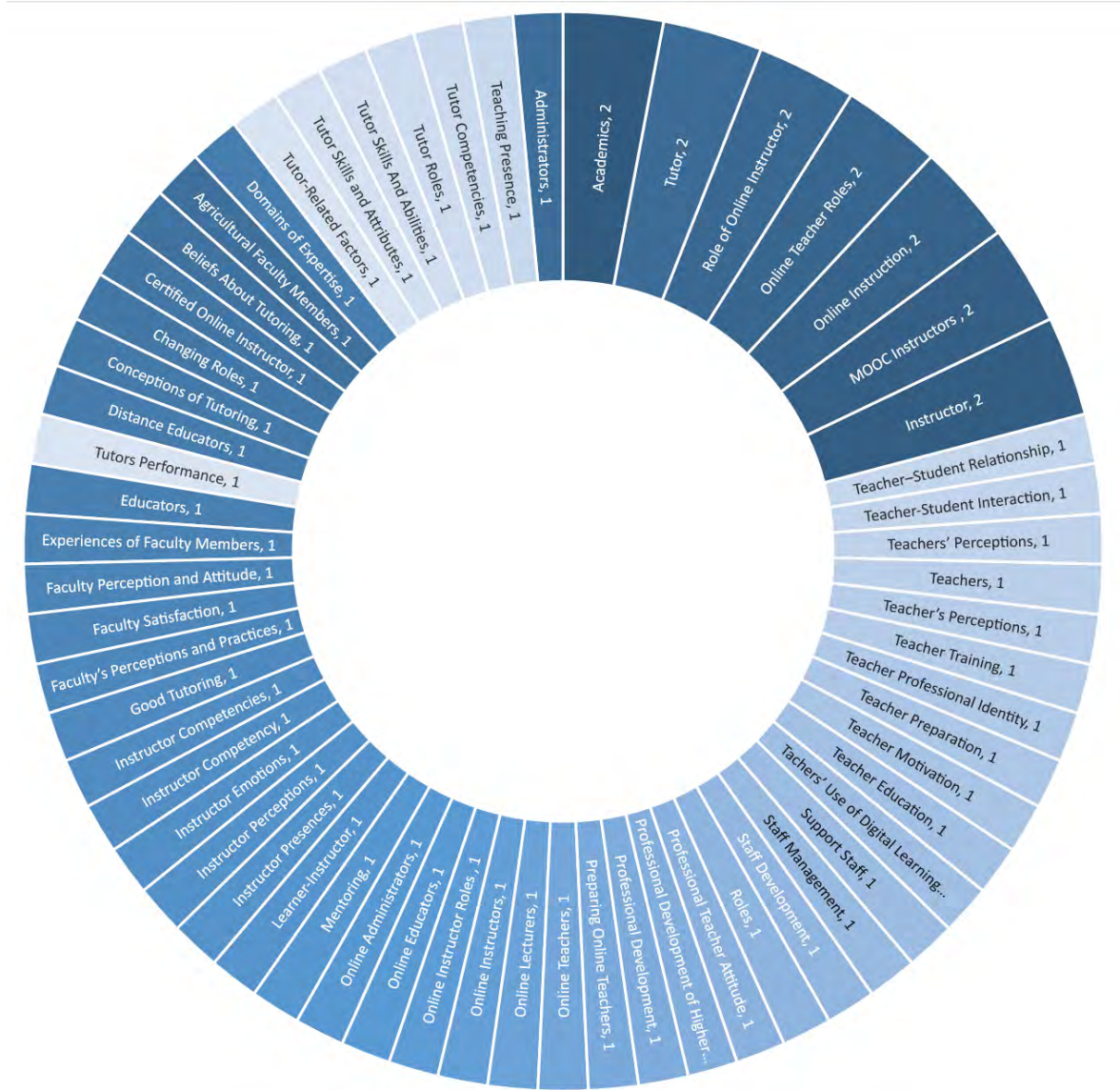


Figure 5. Keywords

The analysis results show that no particular keyword stood out in the studies and the keywords were formed according to the variables analyzed. Figure 5 shows that the most frequently used keywords consist of the terms academic, lecturer, teacher, and tutor and the groups of words used with these terms.

Roles

In the articles examined, it was found that different expressions were used in naming the roles of educators, staff, and administrators. These expressions were analyzed and are shown in Figure 6. The role names are sorted according to their frequency.

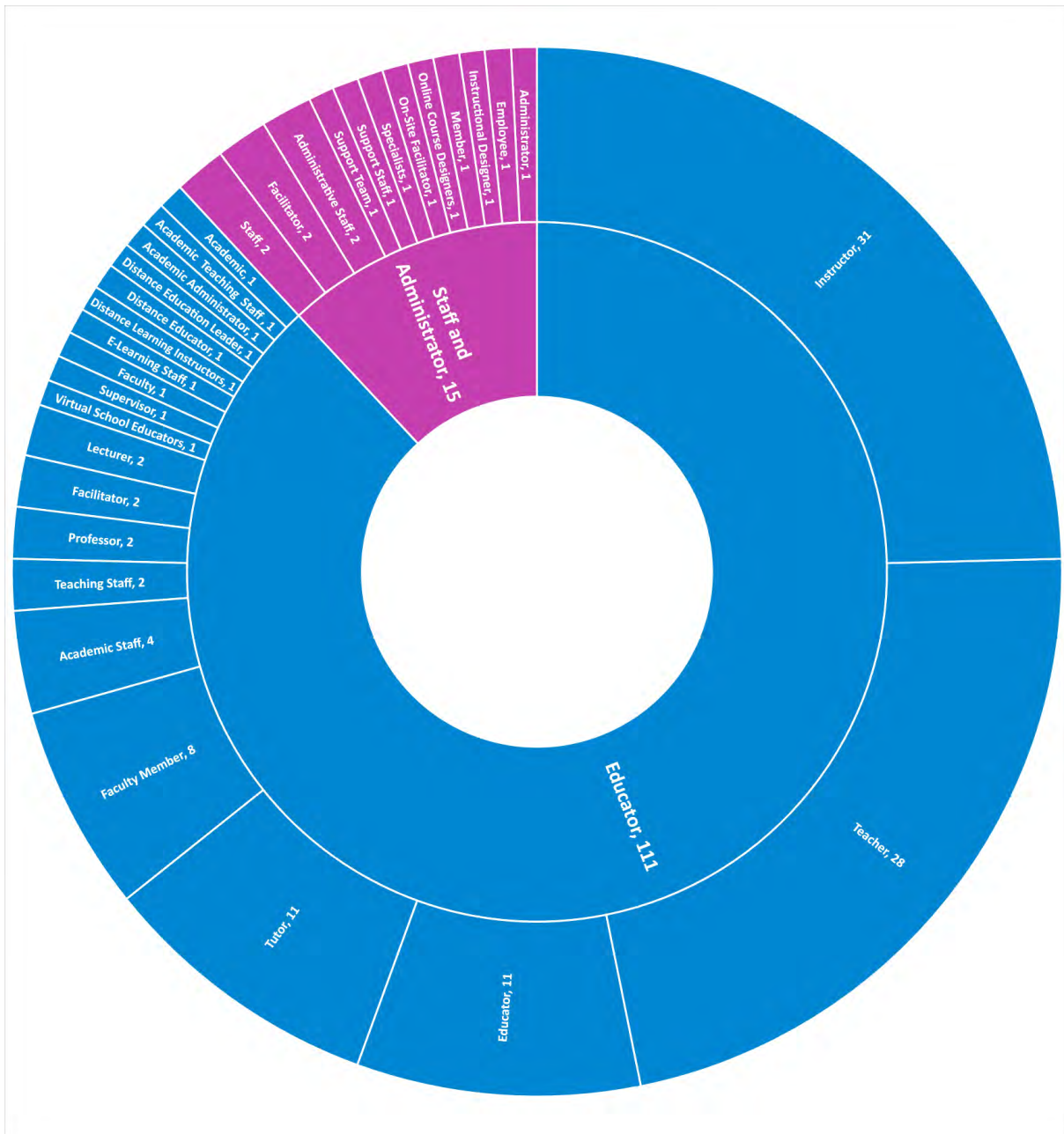


Figure 6. Analysis results of the names assigned to roles

As shown in Figure 6, 20 different expressions were most frequently used for the role of educator, and it was found that the words instructor and teacher were most frequently used among these expressions. However, it was also found that ten different roles were used for staff, and two different roles were used for the administrator. The role of the facilitator was frequently used for both educators and staff. On the other hand, it was found that there was no commonly used role term for staff or administrators.

Analysis of Research Areas and Trends for Educator, Staff, and Administrator in Distance Education

Design

In the analysis of the methods used in the studies reviewed, it was found that different patterns of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods were dealt with. The results regarding the methods used are shown in Figure 7.

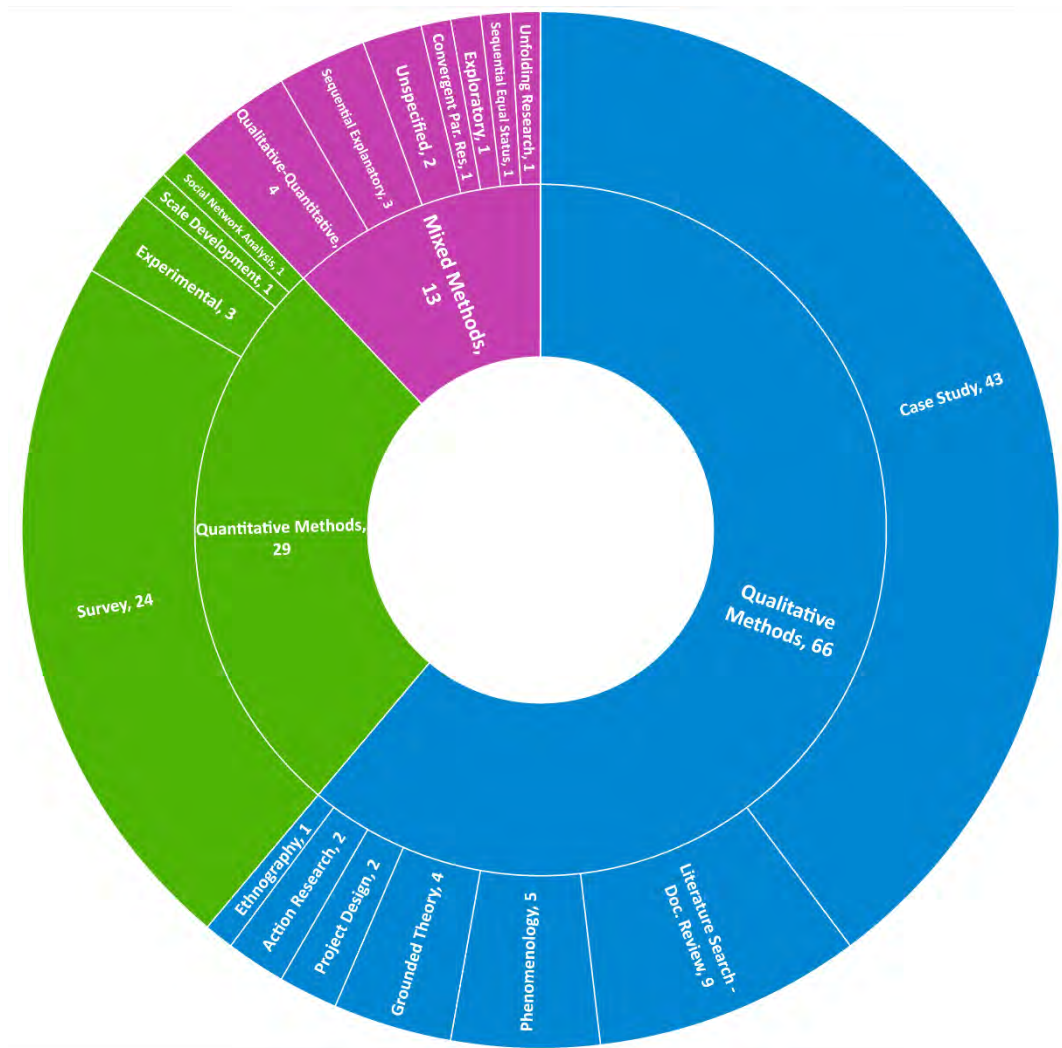


Figure 7. Methods and patterns used in studies

It was found that case studies, one of the qualitative research methods, were used most frequently in the studies of educators, staff, and administrators in distance education. Survey research, one of the quantitative research methods, was the second most frequently used method.

Sample Size

Some of the articles reviewed were found to have collected data from more than one participant group and/or conducted a document review. However, because some studies were literature reviews or reports, it was determined that there was no data group. The results of the data group analysis are shown in Figure 8.

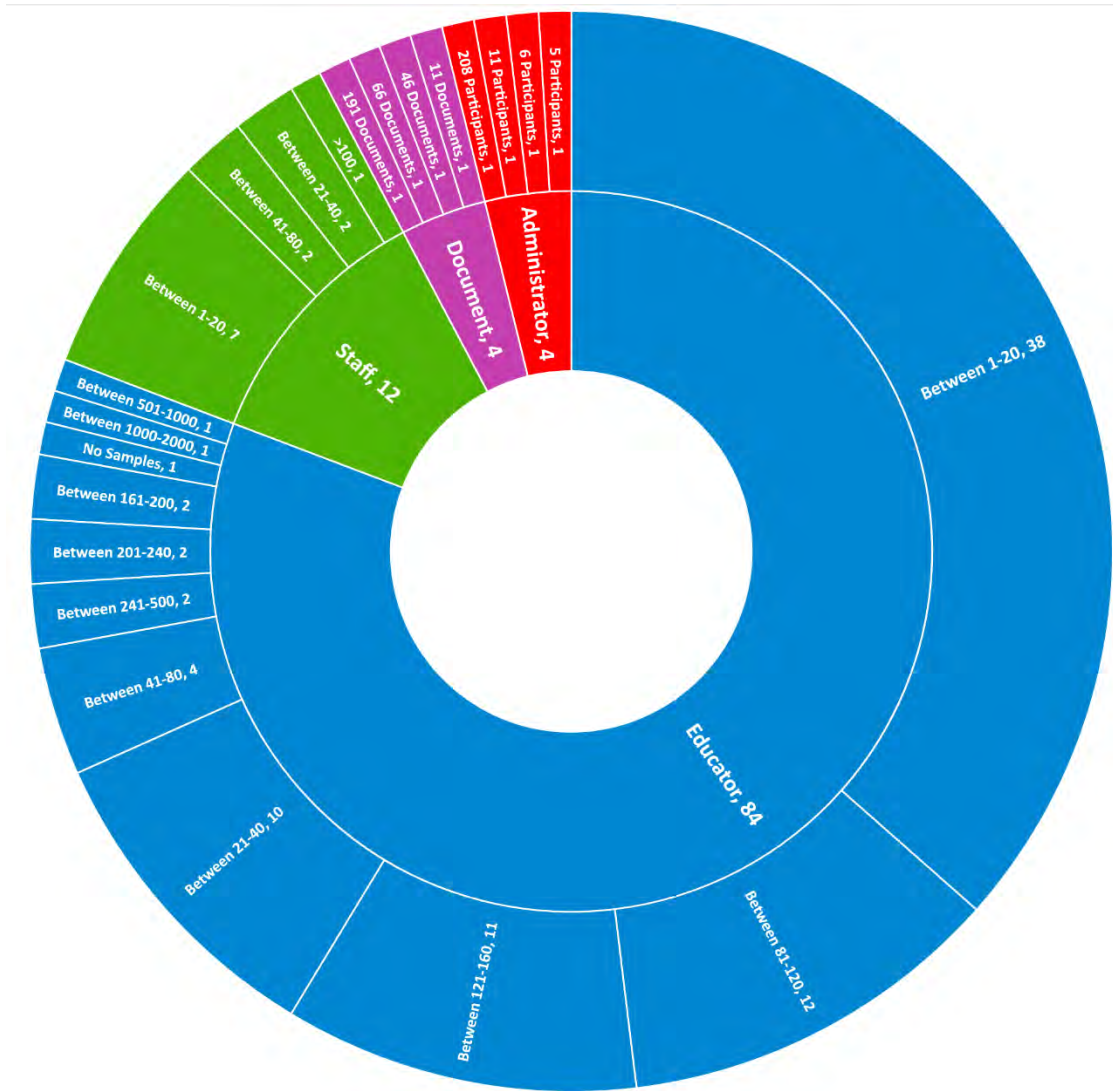


Figure 1. Sample Size

It was found that the number of participants was not reported in the studies, and data were collected from educators in a wide range from one participant to 1587 participants. It was noted that educator data were collected in a range of 1-20 participants or less. Staff and administrators were used as data sources in very few studies compared to educators.

Data Collection Tools

The results on the data collection tools used in the studies can be found in Figure 9. In this regard, it was found that data were mainly collected through interviews and questionnaires.

Data Collection Tools	f
Interview	52
Questionnaire	45
Survey/Test	14
Course Records	10
Site/LMS Data	5
Daily/Essay	3
Instructor Experiences/Shares	3
Observation	3
Portfolio	1
Document	1
Field Notes	1
Total	138

Figure 9. Data collection tools

Data Analysis

Figure 10 shows the results of the analysis of the data collected in the studies. In this direction, most of the articles used more than one method of analysis. It was found that the most commonly used methods of analysis were content analysis and descriptive statistics. However, it was also found that advanced data analysis was used.

Data Analysis Method	f
Content Analysis	49
Descriptive Statistics (Frequency)	35
Descriptive Analysis	21
T Test	11
Literature Search	9
AN[C]OVA	6
Factor Analysis	4
Chi Square	4
Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	3
Regression	3
Mann Whitney U Test	3
Correlation	3
Document Analysis	3
MAN[C]OVA	2
Social Network Analysis	1
SEM	1
Cluster Analysis	1
Scale Development	1
Total	160

Figure 10. Data analysis

Research Suggestions

The suggestions that emerged from the studies were analyzed and tabulated by creating codes and themes. The created table was schematized and presented in Figure 11.



Figure 11. Suggestions of research

For the suggestions made in the study, 32 different codes were identified under six different themes: Instructional Design, variables, Educational Policy, accreditation, and Program Studies, foresight, Repeatability-Adaptability, and Data Collection. Figure 9 shows that many suggestions were made about quality processes in distance education and faculty and staff development in distance education. In addition to these suggestions, suggestions for studying different variables and replicating studies with larger samples also stand out.

Conclusion, Discussions and Future Research Directions

In this study, the studies conducted between 2008 and 2018 for educators, staff, and administrators involved in distance education were analyzed in detail according to their specific characteristics. An attempt was made to identify the corresponding trends. It was observed that many different variables were discussed in the articles studied. At this point, it can be considered that the studies conducted contribute to the literature in general. However, the generalizability of the results of this study remains low because the number of published articles that include a study on a variable is very small, and they were usually conducted with a small sample. Considering the distance education activities that have increased exponentially due to the pandemic COVID -19 and the workload of educators, staff, and administrators involved in distance education, further research before the pandemic could make distance education activities more efficient during the pandemic era. During the COVID -19 pandemic, the importance of the roles and responsibilities of educators and staff using distance education technologies in online learning became more apparent (Johnson et al., 2020). Educators, teachers, and administrators were entirely unprepared for some of the distance education activities conducted during this extraordinary time. The study found that educators have deficits in classroom management and human resources for distance education during the pandemic and need in-service training related to distance education (Sari & Nayir, 2020). Another study suggests that determining the technological features to support students can help educators deepen their teaching methods and techniques and find new ways to support their students (Wardrip, 2020).

On the other hand, it has been emphasized that more experimental studies should be conducted on the provision of video feedback (Ryan, 2021). The work to solve these similar problems and the study of the proposals will be essential to make the distance education process more effective. Bezuidenhout (2018) emphasized that the study he conducted should be replicated in other universities. Rienties et al. (2018) state that no large-scale study investigated how distance education teachers interpret learning analytics. Zhang (2018) emphasizes that more research is needed on language teachers' experiences in distance education. Leary et al. (2020) suggest that educational institutions should conduct studies to uncover the role of online teachers in professional development.

There is no commonality in terms of the use of keywords in the articles studied in the research. The use of common expressions for keywords in the publications makes studies on this topic easier to find. At this point, it is recommended that a study be conducted to ensure that the terms used in distance education are expressed consistently concerning educators, staff, and administrators at the international level. In this way, it will be easier for researchers and educators interested in this field to access the work that has been done. In examining the expressions used for the roles of educator, staff, and administrator, it was found that the words instructor and teacher stood out for educators and the other expressions referred to teaching in general. It was noted that the role names used for staff are generally designed according to the task performed by the staff. It was noted that different role names were not used for administrators. The most noticeable designations assigned to the roles is the facilitator role, which is used for both faculty and staff. The basic philosophy of this role in distance education is to plan, manage, and lead high involvement activities to ensure that the group effectively achieves its goals. Thus, while the instructor facilitates the learning process, the staff organizes the overall structure to facilitate the participants' hardware, software, and communication tools. Garrison et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of this role for students in shaping the online learning experience and strengthening social interaction without interpretation. This role also relates to the concept of instructional scaffolding. The perspective of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) refers to the guidance or support provided by faculty or staff to enhance student learning.

In examining the methods discussed in the studies, it was found that qualitative research methods were predominantly discussed, and the survey method, one of the quantitative research methods, was used, with the case study being the primary method. The use of many different methods in the studies tells us that some of the variables analyzed are discussed in more detail. However, the data collection

instruments used, and the analysis methods carried out show primarily descriptive results. This result is also consistent with the methodological findings. Moreover, we could not find any study that shows the overall effect of the research conducted. Therefore, experimental, causal-comparative, and modeling studies can be included in future studies. In addition, hybrid methods studies combining quantitative and qualitative paradigms can be planned. In examining the sample groups in the studies, data were collected from different groups for educators.

On the other hand, the sample group in four of the studies consists of administrators and 12 of the studies consists of staff. This situation shows the numerical inadequacy of the studies conducted for staff and administrators. Administrators and staff play a key role in planning and coordinating distance education, preparing and monitoring the technological infrastructure, making necessary improvements, and effectively organizing course materials (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Therefore, the studies focus on specific staffing and administrative skills, resource utilization, process management, planning, and coordination. In examining the suggestions in the studies, it was found that there were expressions regarding the quality processes of the distance education process and further professionalization of instructors and staff. The current COVID -19 pandemic process further highlighted the importance of these recommendations. During this time, unprepared countries experienced great difficulties transitioning to distance education with technical and experienced instructors and staff. Countries unprepared during this time are experiencing great difficulty finding technical and experienced sneakers and staff to transition to distance education. National and international organizations provide financial support to countries through various projects and create a roadmap to eliminate educational loss while ensuring equity (WB, 2020; UN, 2020). For example, the Council for Higher Education in Turkey (CHE) has launched Distance Education and Quality Assurance System and has started to improve distance education quality in higher education (CHE, 2020).

On the other hand, the studies included in our results mainly suggest that different sample groups and different variables should be studied. At this point, replicating similar studies in different regions will largely contribute to the literature regarding the generalizability of the results obtained. In a general assessment of the many studies that have been conducted in the field of distance education, it appears that the focus is on the students rather than the educators, staff, or administrators involved in the distance education process and that there are not enough studies with other stakeholders in the distance education process. However, the success of the distance education system depends not only on the students but also on the educators, staff, and administrators who are involved in the system along with the students (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

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