

Future school administration as perceived by school principals in distance learning: Developmental suggestions



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Abstract This study aimed to examine perceptions of school principals regarding future school administration in distance learning and to provide developmental suggestions for future school administration as perceived by school principals in distance learning. To achieve this goal, the researchers employed a qualitative design via personal interviews. The sample consisted of (20) school principals selected purposefully from those who had more than 15 years of experience. According to the results, principals look at the future school administration in distance learning as participatory and teamwork-based collaborative participative administration, with a response percentage of 65%. They believe that future school administration in distance learning is a process based on planning and organization, with a response percentage of 55%. The results also revealed that the most important developmental suggestion lies in training and qualifying the administrative and educational staff regarding the use of technology in education, with a response percentage of 60%. In addition, the respondents suggested to provide suitable strategies to administer the distance learning process, with a response percentage of 50%. In light of the results, a set of recommendations was proposed, most notably, building effective strategic plans should be developed by school principals, with clear future visions and standards that increase teachers' awareness of the importance of education technology. Furthermore, conducting educational workshops on effective distance learning strategies that increase students' interaction and the importance of e-culture for teachers and students and the need to integrate technology into the educational process and its curricula to keep pace with the current era.

Keywords: future school, school principals, public school, distance learning

1. Introduction

School administration is considered an integral part of any educational institution, as it has a leading role in defining the educational goals of the school and coordinating teachers' efforts to achieve them. School administration is a set of educational staff's organized efforts (principals and teachers) within the organizational institution (Musa & Martha, 2020). It is also viewed as a set of group efforts that are organized via the intellectual, psychological and material cooperation of teachers and school administrators, and it is the promotion of teachers' efforts and active work individually or collectively as a way to solve problems and achieve the preplanned social and educational objectives of the schools with the highest efficiency and the least time and effort within an appropriate environment in or out of the school in accordance with the state's policies, which are compatible with society (Bostanci et al., 2020).

The concept of a future school has emerged as a foundation for developing public education, which aims to find an integrated and coherent society within the school society and between schools based on ICT to develop the educational process and methods of explanations and education, which will lead to the generation of more skilled and effective graduates (Andraws et al., 2012). This concept is defined as an administration that is able to understand the administrative, technical and social changes within the school environment that cause the consistency of the variables to increase performance and improve educational outcomes (Torlakson, 2011).

As stated by Al-Fahed (2019), the philosophy of future school lies in a set of principles that are vital in achieving its goals, which can be summarized as follows:

- The humanitarian principle implies the necessity of enabling students to develop the different aspects of their personalities.
- The developmental principle asserts the important linkage between the educational society and NGOs, as well as the need to increase the students' awareness levels of the rules and the need to adhere to them.
- The principle of science education is based on the establishment of science theoretically and practically, which makes it one aspect of public culture and a foundation for life and development.



- The principle of education for work confirms education's interest in linking ideology and work as key aspects of human experience.
- The principle of education for life clarifies the importance of life as a gift from Allah and education's reliance on human experience derived from real life and making it a style for personality development and growth.

On the other hand, distance learning is considered a modern system that meets the needs of the current era and is a feature of future learning. However, some researchers consider the concept of distance learning to be broad; due to its multiple forms and diverse methods, since it depends on delivering information to students regardless of where they are, it exceeds time and space limits and relies on social values in providing the right to learn for all the students (Hamed, 2019: 32).

Distance learning is one of the most successful methods used to address the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting problems in the educational system, one of which involves social distancing among students, teachers, and schools. Therefore, distance learning provides an alternative environment to the traditional environment through a virtual environment that depends on advanced technology (Mahmoud, 2020: 135). However, developing distance learning has led to a turning point in the role of school administrations and the need to guide them to develop the educational process in the school to benefit from ICT to develop system management and educational institutions, facilitate the use of advanced educational methods, and increase the ability to achieve high-quality education (Abdel Bari & Shatat, 2019).

Several researchers have addressed future schools, whereas others have addressed distance learning. Among these studies, the study by Al-Rawayha (2010) in Oman aimed to suggest a program to develop the basic competencies of principals of basic schools in light of their professional needs. The sample of the study consisted of 325 basic school principals selected randomly. A questionnaire consisting of 54 items was developed for data collection. The study revealed that school principals need to develop basic competencies regarding planning, organization, leadership, guidance, decision-making, communication, and assessment.

By interviewing a sample consisting of (20) experts and specialists at the Ministry of Education and professors at Jordanian universities, Alzboon (2011) sought to define the features of the future school. The results revealed that the study sample highly agrees with the key features of future schools in terms of philosophy, teacher specifications, educational administration, school administration, and school building.

In the USA, Dodson (2014) aimed to address the most effective field experience in preparing future schools' principals for this job. The population of the study consisted of all school principals in Kentucky, with a 30% response rate on a questionnaire. The results revealed that those who did not attend the practical program for principals' preparation agreed that they would be better off if they enrolled in that program. It also revealed that there is a clear increase in two important aspects of expertise: Budgetary, funding, and a joint decision-making board.

Another study by Walsh (2015) intended to analyze the development of the educational process at all levels via a descriptive analytical design by asking teachers, students, and principals of 55 schools to answer a questionnaire randomly. The study revealed several results, including defining the requirements of future school administration from technical, human, and legislative requirements and defining the pillars of the leadership and administration system needed to reach the concept of the future school.

To assess the effect of in-service education technology training on teachers in South Africa, Gumbo and colleagues (2012) employed a descriptive design by collecting data from a sample consisting of 304 science and math teachers. The results revealed that training had a positive significant effect on in-service teachers and that there is significant importance for the continuous training of teachers pre- and in-service with respect to modern technology and its use in education.

Using a qualitative analysis design by interviewing (21) teachers, Lim (2015) aimed to understand and develop a theory of integrating ICT into the curriculum for smart schools in Singapore. Teachers are unwilling to change their methods to respond to the challenges they face when integrating ICT into the curriculum.

Additionally, using a descriptive analytical design, Elmashharawi (2020) asked 220 public school teachers in the Gaza strips to respond to a questionnaire. In light of the analysis, there is a need to employ distance learning in the educational process and provide the upper basic stage with the electronic devices needed to apply distance learning.

Zincirli (2021) interviewed a sample of school principals ($n = 46$) to investigate their perspectives in relation to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results revealed that distance learning during the pandemic has positive and negative aspects, as perceived by school principals, and that the most challenging problems were accessing the internet, a lack of technical infrastructure, and a lack of computers and tablets.

2. Problem and Questions

The world has witnessed enormous and rapid developments in information technology, which has led countries to make substantial efforts to keep pace with them in different sectors, especially the educational sector. Given that COVID-19 is widespread in Jordan, there is a need to close schools in accordance with the global health protocol. At the same time, officials saw that there was a need to continue the educational process, which put the educational system and administration in face of several challenges to sustain and ensure the quality of education at a time when the local society was unable to deal with

modern technology and means of communication, as well as unpreparedness for this transition and the imposed changes on the educational system and its reflections of the teachers, as they were unable to address modern technologies and introduce them into the educational process. This also had a negative effect on students, their lack of willingness to self-learn, hence their low motivation toward education, and parents' low degree of participation with school in following up with students in distance learning. Moving away from face-to-face education made the ministry of education move toward distance learning to maintain the continuity of education, which was appropriate for such a period and made it clear that there is a need to provide a set of suggestions related to the available capabilities to cope with this new situation. Thus, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of school principals regarding future school administration in distance learning?
- What are the development suggestions for future school administration in distance education?

3. Objectives

This study aims to define the potential of future school administration from the perspective of school principals and to provide important suggestions that can contribute to the development of future school performance in distance education.

4. Significance

It is hoped that this study will benefit from enriching the theoretical literature with a set of suggestions that will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of future school administration to reach its goals in distance learning. It can also benefit school principals in defining the status quo of distance learning; thus, it can help teachers and parents deal with it easily. Moreover, it is hoped that the results of the study will provide researchers with the opportunity to conduct new research addressing the administration of future schools and their ability to face the challenges that may face such schools.

5. Definitions

Future School: A type of school that is based on the enormous potential of ICT, which encourages students to self-learn and provides them with the opportunity to reach different learning resources and obtain different types of information through computer labs (Markoun & Lamoushy, 2019: 197).

School Principal: Job description of the technical administration of the school in accordance with educational policies and methods, in a way that serves the educational process in light of the available resources and capabilities (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Distance Learning: The public education system is open to all, not restricted to a time or specific group of learners, and it is not limited to a specific level or type of education, as it is appropriate to the nature and needs of society, its individuals and their aspirations and develops their mission (Al-Haj & Abu Rawa, 2020: 265). In this study, it is defined as an educational method that aims to deliver knowledge to learners at any time and place via different modern technologies.

6. Methods and Procedures

6.1. Methodology

The researchers employed a qualitative design to provide an in-depth description and understanding of things and determine how to obtain different results and opinions by using semistructured interviews to collect data to focus on the perceptions of school principals of future school administration in distance learning and provide some suggestions for development.

6.2. Study sample

A sample of public school principals at Ajloun governorate (n = 20) was selected purposefully on the basis of their administrative experience, as more than 15 years were needed to participate in the interviews.

6.3. Instrument

A semistructured interview was employed to reveal the perceptions of public school principals of future school administration in distance learning and provide some suggestions to develop it. The instrument of the study was developed by reviewing the previous literature and a set of previous studies related to future school and distance learning. The questions of the interview were as follows:

- What are your perceptions of future school administration?
- What is the potential of future school administration?
- What are your suggestions for improving the performance of future schools in distance learning?

To ensure the validity of the instrument, a group of faculty members working in Jordanian universities were asked to provide their remarks about the suitability of the study questions and the authenticity of its phrasing, as amendments were made in light of them.

6.4. Data analysis

To analyze the data collected via the semistructured interviews, the researchers employed the qualitative research analysis design proposed by Oliver (Oliver, 2000), represented by the grounded theory method, where the respondents' answers were transcribed after they were read carefully, coded and categorized them, and then frequencies and percentages were calculated.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. What are the perceptions of school principals regarding future school administration in distance learning?

This question sought to explore the perceptions of school principals regarding the school administration in distance learning by interviewing (20) school principals. Their responses showed variance in the frequencies and percentages of their perceptions. However, the results of the analysis revealed that the respondents had old fashion perceptions regarding school administration, resulting in varying response percentages. The responses were categorized into main categories on the basis of the analysis of the semistructured interviews, presented and arranged according to their importance in a way that reflects the perceptions of the school administration as follows:

- participatory and collaborative administration working in teamwork.
- A process based on planning and organization.
- An administration that has a future message and vision.

7.1. First theme: Participatory and collaborative administration working in teamwork

Thirteen respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 65%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

- "... is the one that works on the principle of teachers' participation in decision making and delegation of some powers".
- "... is team-based administration to improve the learning process".

This theme has the highest percentage, which can be attributed to the fact that future school administration is an administration that requires independence in managing its administration in accordance with its powers within an environment that is based on decision making, which will lead to the achievement of the desired objectives. The principal, as a leader, is the one who invests his subordinates' abilities positively and works on finding an educational environment that is able to increase the level of performance and the quality of education to benefit the institution by finding flexibility and human relations, encouraging collaborative work, and involving them in the decision-making process. This result is consistent with the study of Dodson (2014), which confirmed the importance of having good communication channels between teachers and their leaders and involving them in decision-making.

7.2. Second theme: A process based on planning and organization

Eleven respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 55%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

- "... is the administration that organizes the educational process".
- "... is the process of planning, organizing, managing, and supervising the activities of the educational institution".

This result can be attributed to the fact that this theme is considered an element that enables the school to fully perform its responsibilities, helps it define its capabilities, and distributes works by specialization in a way that ensures completing them and achieving the desired goals, in addition to the need for an organizational structure that allows for the allocation of responsibilities and activities among teachers and defines the relationships between them in an organized, clear and coordinated manner. It also eliminates the duplication of specialization; thus, a school administration organization is achieved. This result is consistent with the results of Al-Rawayha (2010), who confirmed the need to develop the administrative capabilities of school principals.

7.3. Third theme: An administration that has a future message and vision

Four respondents referred to this theme with a response rate of 20%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... is the administration that has a vision and a message through which the educational sector aims to achieve the goals set".

"... is an administration that has a vision and a message that seeks to meet the students' needs".

This result was low, which can be attributed to the need for continuous training on developing plans with effective future visions to keep up with the development of the educational process. Additionally, planning processes mostly depend only on the experience of the principal, which could not be enough to achieve the hoped expectations because of its variation and time difference and not sharing the future hopes of teachers. This result is consistent with the results of Alzboon (2011), who focused on the main potential of the future school regarding its philosophy, as well as teacher specifications and the potential of its educational administration.

In relation to future school administration's potential, the responses of school principals showed variance in the frequencies and percentages of their perceptions. The results of the analysis revealed that the respondents had different opinions, resulting in varying response percentages. These responses were categorized into main categories on the basis of the analysis of the semistructured interviews, presented and arranged according to their importance in a way that reflects the perceptions of the principals as follows:

- Providing a suitable interactive learning environment.
- Advanced curricula.
- Employing technology in education.

7.4. First theme: Providing a suitable interactive learning environment

Twelve respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 60%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... is the ability to provide an appropriate school environment for both the students and the teachers".

"... the existence of an appropriate educational environment that enables students to focus in the class".

This result can be attributed to the fact that one of the objectives of the future school is pursuing an appropriate school environment that is able to prepare students, build their self-confidence, promote their values, create an educational environment that improves the education process, and is concerned with students' academic achievement and extracurricular activities that develop their capacities by selecting a suitable geographical location with an appropriate design that contains all the services required by the students to enable them to obtain the education service easily, with an infrastructure that provides services to teachers and students, containing educational instruments and modern technological tools that enrich the education process, increasing the motivation of students and increasing the level of teacher performance, within a set of regulations and laws governing the educational process. This result is consistent with the results provided by Alzboon (2011) and Walsh (2015), as both affirmed the specifications of the appropriate physical and human school environment and its role in achieving the objectives of the educational process.

7.5. Second theme: Advanced curricula

Eleven respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 55%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... paying attention to curricula that are central to ensuring quality education"

"... developing new curricula that pay attention to extracurricular activities and linking them to modern technologies".

This can be attributed to the fact that future schools' potential lies in providing curricula that keep pace with the developments of the modern era, provide meaningful learning experiences associated with reality, and develop students mentally and intellectually by adopting scientific research methods that are different from traditional methods, suit students' levels and orientations and develop their self-learning. It also reflects the message and vision of the school, prepares the teachers to be able to deal with continuously developing curricula, pays attention to the learning content that enriches and develops thinking, and takes into account the developments in the different sectors of life in line with available capabilities. This result is consistent with Walsh's (2015) results, which defined the requirements for the administration of future schools, including technical, human, and legislative requirements, as well as the pillars of the leadership and administration system needed to reach the concept of future schools.

7.6. Third theme: Employing technology in education

Thirteen respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 65%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... availability of technology, internet, and distance learning platforms are needed".

"... availability of an environment that offers entering technology to the educational process".

This result can be attributed to the necessity of employing various modern technologies that serve the education process and increase its level, adopting modern teaching methods that advance the educational process, and making information easily accessible in an attempt to avoid traditional teaching methods. These technologies also play a role in the transfer of knowledge skills, as these technologies are characterized by their ability to transfer experiences via photos, sounds, videos, and presentations, as they enable students to interact and participate effectively by motivating creativity and keeping abreast of scientific developments associated with students' lives and realities. It also develops their tendencies and positive behavioral patterns. This result is consistent with that presented by Gumbo and colleagues (2012), who pointed to the importance of employing technology in education and stressed the need to use technology and integrate it into educational curricula.

7.7. What are the development suggestions for future school administration in distance education?

This question sought to provide development suggestions for future schools in distance education. To achieve this goal, twenty school principals were interviewed, and in light of the analysis of the results, it was found that there was variance in the frequencies and percentages of their perceptions. The responses were categorized into main categories on the basis of the analysis of the semistructured interviews, presented and arranged according to their importance as follows:

- Training administrative and educational staff and qualifying them on the use of technology in education
- Encourage the interaction between the teacher and the student through the distance learning process and encourage their self-learning
- Suitable strategies are provided to administer the distance learning process.

7.8. First theme: Training administrative and educational staff and qualifying them on the use of technology in education

Twelve respondents referred to this theme, with a response rate of 60%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... qualifying the teaching and administrative staff and providing training courses and programs to them".

"... qualifying teachers and training them on modern technology used in distance learning".

"... training leaders and teachers and raising their competencies and encouraging them to innovate".

This result can be attributed to the high level of awareness among school principals with respect to the importance of training in the age of the rapid spread of information technology in all aspects of life, especially educational technology, which makes it necessary to be aware of the technical culture so that they can easily address it in light of the need to transfer to distance learning. Thus, there is a need to publish the culture of distance learning among school staff due to its ability to improve the quality of education. This result is in line with that provided by Gumbo and colleagues (2012), who pointed to the importance of teachers training before and after service on modern technology and employing it in education.

7.9. Second theme: Encourage the interaction between the teacher and the student through the distance learning process and encourage their self-learning

Four respondents referred to this theme with a response rate of 20%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

"... maintain positive communication between the teacher and the students".

"... maintain effective communication lines between the teacher and the students to clarify the strategies of distance learning".

This result is attributed to problems that prevent the required positive communication, such as technical problems, including different means of communication, limiting education to the theoretical level, and difficulty in implementing extracurricular activities, which cause students' lack of interest and boredom as a result of the absence of strategies for critical thinking and discussion. Therefore, school administrations need training workshops for teachers on the technological skills and techniques of education and good planning, in addition to providing a suitable learning environment for students' distance learning to ensure their effective participation in the education and learning process by clarifying the concept of self-learning for students. Lim (2015) pointed to this result as well as Zincirli (2021), as they both addressed the most challenging problems of distance learning, such as teachers' lack of keenness to communicate with students or change their methods, in addition to the difficulty of accessing the internet, and the lack of technical infrastructure prevented the completion of the education process easily.

7.10. Third theme: Provide suitable strategies to administer the distance learning process

Ten respondents referred to this theme with a response rate of 50%. The respondents made several comments, such as the following:

- " ... proper planning of the distance learning mechanism and defining its appropriate strategies".
- " ... provide the plans and the strategic future policies".

This result is attributed to the fact that modern education strategies play a role in delivering information to students easily, contributing to building knowledge appropriately to achieve goals and overcoming traditional strategies. It also guides students' energy toward effective participation and encourages their self-learning to achieve the desired educational outcomes. Discussion, investigation, and modern technology are able to spread entrepreneurship, motivation, exploration, and innovation, and they also develop self-learning skills, cooperation, and good communication between the teacher and the student, which in turn achieve effective distance learning; therefore, continuous training on these strategies is needed to enable teachers to activate them. This result is consistent with that provided by Gumbo and colleagues (2012).

8. Recommendations

- Effective strategic plans should be developed by school principals, with clear future visions and standards that increase teachers' awareness of the importance of education technology.
- Holding training courses and workshops for teachers on effective distance learning strategies that increase students' interaction.
- Educational and awareness workshops are needed on the importance of e-culture for teachers and students and the need to integrate technology into the educational process and its curricula to keep abreast of modern times.

Ethical considerations

This is a qualitative research study, based on interviews with 20 individuals. All factors of protecting participants were taken into consideration and all of the collected information were confidential.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this article. Author 1 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review, performed the statistical analysis and interpreted the results. Author 2 wrote the research methodology and questions of the study, developed the instrument of the study, reviewed the previous studies, and overlooked the writeup of the whole article.

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