DISTANCE EDUCATION, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN SMALL ISLANDS IN NORTH MALUKU PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology in providing learning opportunities for women on small islands in North Maluku in accessing higher education. Through distance education, in the case of the Open University has provided positive value to those who do not have the opportunity to enter higher education as conventional higher education. The purpose of this study is to find out the participation of women in small islands in North Maluku Province to participate in distance education facilitated by digital technology, as well as the strategies implemented by the Open University in explaining the learning platform to students. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. Approach to literature review, interviews, and observations of distance education study objects and students in study groups on Sanana Island and Taliabu Island. . The results of this study show that distance education implemented by the Open University through digital technology has facilitated better access to education for women who previously had learning limitations both in terms of tradition and geographically and economically on the islands of Sanana and Taliabu. The implication of this study is that the importance of distance education can be an effective means for women to achieve educational equality in small island areas.

INTRODUCTION

The modern world, which is constantly evolving, has a large selection of information and the convenience of technology. Most people consider information technology from media platforms as a tool that allows them to access information according to their needs. The choice of information offered by media information technology allows interaction and encourages social and cultural change (Hanana A, Anindya A & Elian N, 2020; Anindya A, Hanana A & Elian N, 2021).

Technological developments have made it easy for information sources to spread from various regions, even information spreads quickly from remote areas in Indonesia to various countries (Putri et al., 2021). Technology is not a taboo thing in society, but it has become a necessity in daily life. Day by day, technology continues to experience rapid development. The rapid development of digital technology today cannot be separated from the world of education. The era of globalization requires the world of education to continue to adapt to technological developments in improving the quality of education, especially the learning process (Sudihartinih, Hajizah, & Marzuki, 2021). Digital technology is able to change the implementation of learning to be more in accordance with the situation (Ridwan, 2022). Education with digital

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technology is no longer limited by space and time, but online learning activities can be carried out anytime and anywhere (Mubarok, 2021).

Online learning (online or online) has been applied to the world of education through Distance Education (PJJ). Distance Education is listed in the regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas) (Yuliani, 2021). For the most part, distance education is a formal method that allows students to interact with teachers and instructors from different places. Distance education is consistently supported by communication systems and various information sources (Cacheiro-Gonzalez, 2019; Haslina Md Harizan & Faiz Hilmi, 2021).

Distance Education (PJJ) in the implementation of the online learning system fulfills the use of digital technology media in the form of the internet, computer applications, etc. to support the learning process that continues even though there is no unity of space and time (Damayanti, 2019; Hidayat, Hasanah, & Rahma, 2021; Suradika, Winata, Wicaksono, & Sofian Hadi, 2020). Distance education provides an opportunity for adult students to take responsibility for their own education. With the help of digital technology, distance education makes students more flexible when it comes to time. Distance education will also provide access and opportunities for everyone to get a quality education, just like regular education in general. Distance education can be implemented in various forms, modes, scopes, and is supported by a variety of educational facilities and services, as well as an assessment system that ensures that students graduate with national standards.

In some countries distance education has been used for more than a hundred years, such as Asian, European and American countries (Beuttler, 2021); Keegan & Gemuruh, 2018). And in Indonesia, the Open University has implemented a distance education model as the only university that implements distance education as an alternative strategy to provide access and quality of higher education to everyone. The Open University (UT) answers the problems of the 21st century in the field of education (Dwi, Suhandoko, & Hanubun, 2022).

In accordance with the motto or tagline of the Open University "Making Education Open to All" which provides opportunities for all levels of Indonesian society wherever they are to continue to higher education and reach the unreached. Therefore, Open Universities are present in all regions in Indonesia, from big cities to small islands, facing various challenges in each region, and one of them is the different geographical conditions in Indonesia.

Geographical conditions in Indonesia are often the main obstacle in the process of equitable and quality distribution of educational services. Although the 1945 Constitution has given a mandate to the state to ensure equal access to education for the nation's children, in reality there are still gaps caused by regional barriers. And also the gap in access to education between urban and rural areas, variations in the quality of education, and scarcity of educational resources (Sidik, Tanipu, Solapari, Assabana, & Rahman, 2023). In this dilemma, distance education developed by the Open University is the main solution.

Distance education has succeeded in realizing the dream of the Indonesian people in receiving education in Indonesia. The Open University has provided the right platform for all human beings who have high aspirations in achieving quality of life through education. While other universities are unable to provide homes for those with limited access in various ways, Open University has come to the fore to overcome all these limitations. It becomes a learning model that no longer pays attention to distance, age and cost. Everyone in remote areas of the archipelago can easily enjoy good and quality educational services.

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The presence of the Open University in North Maluku has created opportunities for all people in North Maluku, especially women who live on small islands. The existence of Tebuka University in North Maluku continues to be in demand by the community and this can be evidenced by the increase in the number of students, which is no less than two thousand students. Based on data obtained by the author in the registration period for the 2023 Ternate Open University odd semester 2023.2, there are a total of 2,183 active students from districts/cities in North Maluku. There are 7 (seven) districts/cities (kabko) and among them there are Study Groups (Pokjar) for the Sanana Islands and Taliabu Island. These two islands are the farthest islands in North Maluku and there are many small islands with limited transportation to travel outside the area.

From the data available at UPBBJ Ternate, for study groups (Pokjar) in the Sanana Islands, there are 310 active students with 172 male students and 148 female students. And in the study group (Pokjar) on Taliabu Island, there are 92 active students with 41 male students and 51 female students. The author sees that the number of male and female students is not too far away. The data above is unique, where women on small islands can still pursue higher education despite limitations, such as traditional factors that mean women have to stay at home or not far from their families.

Women have the opportunity in gender equality to have social interaction with the surrounding environment. As Anindya explained, it is very important in social interaction to learn gender understanding, especially when participating in communication activities. This is intended so that everyone is able to respect each other and appreciate their own self-concept, gender identity, and communication experience (Anindya, 2018).

Especially if you are a married woman or a housewife who has the responsibility of taking care of the family and home. In some communities where we live, there are still traditions that do not encourage or even prohibit women's participation in formal education (Amalia, 2019). In addition, there is the geographical factor located on small islands with limited transportation access and very long distances if you have to study at a conventional university within the city, and another limitation lies in the economy, because it is undeniable that transportation costs are expensive because it has to take days to get to the city and costs a lot.

Through digital technology, distance education can be implemented effectively to provide learning opportunities to women on small islands in North Maluku Province. Women on small islands in North Maluku in accessing higher education through distance education, Open University with the motto of reaching the unreachable has provided positive value to those who do not have the opportunity to enter higher education such as conventional higher education. By using information technology, the efficiency of distance and time is no longer an obstacle in education.

In this article, the author will explain the extent of women's participation in small islands in North Maluku Province in participating in distance education facilitated by digital technology, as well as the strategies implemented by the Open University in explaining learning platforms to students and experiences for women's participation in education. in the small island area.

METHOD
This research was written using descriptive qualitative methods. Approach to literature review, interviews and observations of distance education study objects and female students in study groups on the Sanana Islands and Taliabu Island in North Maluku Province. Literature review, whatever the method, is an important part of scientific research (El Hafiz & Himawan, 2020). Literature review on distance learning and

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available data documents that are relevant to the topic of distance education digital technology and providing learning opportunities for women in the small islands of North Maluku.

This research also used direct interview methods with female students in the Sanana Islands and Taliabu Island as key informants for this research. The supporting informants in this research are tutors and administrative staff from the Ternate Open University. The results of the research were analyzed in several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The context of the development of distance education in Indonesia has a long history, because Indonesia is an archipelagic country with more than 13,000 islands and limited infrastructure and means of communication and transportation. Geographic, demographic, socio-economic, availability of appropriate technology, and community culture have encouraged the use of the distance education system in an effort to increase access and equitable distribution of educational opportunities in terms of level, path, and type. Distance education in Indonesia has been used in both formal and non-formal education, developing with the times, starting from using printed teaching materials sent using a correspondence system, then enriched by the use of various types of media then using new computer-aided technology and developing into digital technology.

Distance education continues to grow in line with the rapid advancement of digital technology, and 21st century innovations and learning methods that have the power to reach across space, time and socio-economy. With distance education, people have alternative options for accessing education. Distance education is seen as one of the possible solutions to increase equality of educational opportunities in Indonesia. In addition, the distance education system also has high flexibility, wide coverage, and is more affordable than conventional education.

The provision of distance education is generally also called open learning, open education, correspondence education, or education by air. However, in various ways, the distance education system is developing because it is supported by the development of information and communication technology and digital technology which then develops various kinds of digital learning platforms. Distance education has proven to be real in efforts to develop an intelligent and knowledgeable Indonesian society.

In 1980, the Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen Dikti) implemented a distance education system through satellites (Sisdiksat) to improve the quality of education, especially in Eastern Indonesia. With distance learning, lecturers from Jakarta can communicate interactively with other students in their classes in Eastern Indonesia. The Sisdiksat facility also utilizes the Open University as a tutorial facility for students of Tebuka University in Eastern Indonesia. The Open University as a distance education institution has provided many pioneers in implementing a quality assurance system in distance education. Quality assurance adheres to the principle of continuous improvement so that efforts to improve quality are carried out continuously (UT 2002).

Indonesia's geographical and demographic conditions encourage the intensive use of technology and media, and new technologies are constantly being developed. Then, starting in the 2000s, several innovations in the use of technology in distance education at the higher education level in the country were carried out by involving the use of networks to help the learning process, creating a learning environment assisted by digital technology (Belawati, 2000; Padmo, Huda &; Belawati, 2000; Suradijono, Nazief, Subagdja & Moningka, 2000). The use of digital technology in distance education through the Open University in

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the distance learning system, using a guided independent learning system for all students. The term distance means that learning is not carried out face-to-face, but using media, both print media (modules) and non-print media (audio/video, computer/internet/digital technology, radio and television broadcasts). Meanwhile, the guided independent learning system is an innovative approach in education offered by the Open University. In this system, students will have access to a variety of educational resources, including online learning materials, digital textbooks, learning videos, and others.

Students have the flexibility to learn according to their own pace and learning style, while still receiving targeted guidance from tutors or lecturers. Tutors or lecturers will provide guidance, provide additional explanations, and answer questions that may arise during the learning process. This interaction can be direct through a variety of channels, including rock learning services provided by the Open University, online meetings or direct communication via message. In addition, the Open University's learning service mode includes Face-to-Face Tutorial mode service (for those in the same area and made at the request of students so that there are direct activities between students and tutors), Webinar/Tuweb Tutorial mode service (synchronously meeting students with tutors using a platform from Microsoft Teams), Online Tutorial mode service (using a eleaning.ut.ac.id platform that is accessed online without face-to-face or asynchronously), Independent learning mode service (students learn independently using learning modules without tutors/lecturers). All forms of learning mode services offered by the Open University using digital technology have attracted the attention and interest of the public to continue higher education at the Open University.

Based on data obtained from the Open University https://www.ut.ac.id/ut-dalam-angka/ website, it can be seen that the number of Open Students who registered was 439,222, the data was taken on April 29, 2023. And dominated by women rather than men, it can be seen from the diagram on the UT website in numbers.

Berdasarkan Jenis Kelamin

Berdasarkan Jenis Kelamin MR : 2023.1

Jenis Kelamin	Jumlah	%
Perempuan	279.139	63,55%
Laki-laki	160.083	36,45%
Total	439.222	100%

*data obtained from Open University, 2023.

The results of the chart above show that more women are interested in continuing their education at the Open University compared to 279,139 presentations compared to 160,083 men. So it can be concluded that the Open University provides opportunities for women to learn regardless of all the challenges or limitations that women have.

Distance education can promote women's liberation and empowerment by providing better opportunities for education and overcoming barriers to learning. Women often face major barriers to education, such as limited access to educational institutions and cultural norms that prioritize men's education. Distance learning can help address these challenges by providing flexible learning opportunities that can be accessed from anywhere (Care & Udod, 2000). Online learning through open and distance learning has been recognized as a potential solution to help girls achieve their educational goals. This increases women's access to education and empowers them to realize their educational aspirations (Lesinger, Şenol, & Hürriyetoğlu, 2022).

Women's Participation in Small Islands in North Maluku Province in Participating

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in Distance Education Facilitated by Digital Technology.

The provision of opportunities for women to study is also wide open in the small islands of North Maluku. Women's interest in learning despite all limitations in terms of tradition as well as geographically and economically is not an obstacle, because they can channel their desire for higher education at the Open University. The Open University, through the UPBJJ representative office in the Ternate region, located in the province of North Maluku, provides opportunities for women on small islands to study at the Open University. The enthusiasm of women on small islands to study is not easy. They have to face the tradition of being women who have to take care of their homes and families, even geographical factors that are far from internet network facilities so that accessing online learning platforms requires a long distance trip from the village where they live.

Female students are working on coursework
in place with a signal·

Female student while crossing the island
Use the boat to get to the exam site

Lisda

Female students after participating in

New student study orientation activities

From several documentations, women on the small islands of North Maluku are students of the Open University and travel long distances from where they live to get a signal and be able to access online lectures. Based on the results of the interview, the author described eight female students from the Sanana Island and Taliabu Island study groups who studied at the Open University.

The student is named Mrs. Rohani Pokjar of Taliabu Island who lives in Samuya village. Ibu Rohani, a student majoring in PGSD, who is a housewife, said that she studied at UT because of her husband's motivation and as an encouragement for her children. Even if their mother was just a housewife, she could still go to college. The Open University really gave me the opportunity to continue my studies, even though I live on a remote island and the distance to the sub-district is very far, it takes 4 hours by boat. Studying at UT wasn't easy for me as a housewife and had never touched learning technology, but when I first had the courage to apply to study at UT, that's when I was determined to learn and try to understand how to study at UT. Especially at UT we are required to know how to learn online using online tutorial applications, and some teaching courses have practice so it is mandatory for us to meet with tutors or lecturers through the Microsoft Teams application and do webinar tutorials. And alhamdulillah, since the beginning as new students, we have received guidance from the staff of Ternate Open University with

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OSMB (New Student Study Orientation) activities on how we can access digital technology, online learning media at UT.

Furthermore, a student named Mrs. Heni Pokjar Taliabu Island works as a civil servant, said that the learning facilities at UT made it very easy for her to continue her studies and work. Without UT, maybe I would not be able to propose a promotion to the class as a civil servant in the future. The first time I became a UT student was very confusing, because I was too smart to use a laptop and open online lectures on an online tutorial platform. However, because we are new students, we are guided by UT staff in teaching how to access several digital technology media in the form of elearning.ut.ac.id applications, reading digital teaching materials in the online library, and introducing other digital applications. UT makes it easy for us to learn, but to learn we need to struggle when studying online. Especially if the lecture time has been scheduled, my friends and I will make arrangements to go to a neighboring place or village that has a signal so that we can attend lectures online. Once a week we will cross the island to find an area with a signal to study.

There was also an explanation from a student named Mrs. Runia Pokjar of Sanana Island who lives in Capalulu village. Mrs. Juwina works as a teacher, and said that she is now in her final semester and is taking a scientific work course (career). Because there is no thesis at UT, students are required to follow and make scientific papers that are uploaded to the Karil application. The experience of studying at UT is that we must be technologically literate, in other words, like it or not, we must know how to utilize digital technology, because UT students will

continue to be faced with various learning media platforms. For example, when we as PGSD students have practical lectures and must have a tutor or supervisor, then we must meet with tutors through Tuweb. In addition, there are also Course Assignments (TMK) that must be submitted through online tmk.ut.ac.id, and at the time of the final semester exam after the 19-19 pandemic is called Take Home Exam (THE), an application that we must access to get exam questions and collect them also in the same application, namely the.ut.ac.id and this is all regulated by the Open University based on time and date. Alhamdulillah, UT made me know how to use digital technology media so that I can do it at the end of the semester and hopefully this year I can finish it.

The next explanation was a student named Mrs. Eka Pokjar of Sanana Island who lives in Buya Village. Eka's mother is not yet working, saying that she studied at UT because of her status as the only daughter in the family and her parents only worked as farmers. The desire to continue her studies after graduating from a high school outside the city, but her parents did not allow her because she was a woman, and also because of her economic disadvantage. When UT did outreach at his school in the Sanana Islands area, UT became the only alternative for him to continue his dream of studying science. I am proud to be able to study at UT because UT is a public campus and various digital-based lecture facilities. I can still make friends with fellow students from other regions, besides that UT with its cheap tuition fee of only 1,300,000 is accompanied by textbooks or modules that we get. Although there is still no good internet connection in my village, I am still enthusiastic about learning and I will usually

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use a motorbike to go to a high school where there is an internet facility to do my coursework.

In addition to the female informants interviewed, the author also interviewed one staff member of Ternate Open University, and one tutor who teaches at the Open University. Mrs. Badaria, as one of the administrative staff at the Open University, explained that the demographic condition in North Maluku is dominated by islands, and the service process related to lecture administration, monitoring, student recruitment, socialization and promotion (Sosprom), conveyed modules to the working group. This is an obstacle and challenge for UPBJJ management. We have to travel by sea for days to get to the Pokjar area to do all these activities. The Taliabu Island Pokjar area, for example, must be traveled by sea for 2 days and 2 nights. If you are using an airplane, you will have to transit in Makassar and Luwuk Banggai and then cross by boat. It's a truly energy-intensive journey.

Traveling by sea transportation depends on the boat schedule and the weather on the boat route there. Sometimes, trips have to be postponed if the weather conditions are unfriendly, or the working group team is unable to return to UPBJJ according to the specified schedule due to uncertain weather conditions or ship schedules. However, all of these processes are going as they should. Based on a sense of responsibility and advancing the Open University in remote areas of North Maluku, the UPBJJ Ternate management can carry out and complete its duties and obligations well. This excellent performance continues to be maintained so that the existence of Tebruka University education continues to be maintained and

students from various levels can enjoy the educational services of the Open University.

As a tutor, Mr. Saman lives on Sanana Island, and has received trust from the Open University to teach at Pokjar Falabisahaya in the CSR Scholarship class majoring in State Administration. Mr. Saman explained his experience while being a tutor or teaching staff at the Open University and had to teach at the Falabisahaya working group which is on a different island from Sanana Island. Access from Sanana Island to Falabisahaya is by boat and takes one day. There is only one boat schedule per week, so when he teaches in Falabisahaya on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, he will board a boat on Thursday and arrive on Friday morning in Falabisahaya, and when he returns to Sanana Island on Sunday afternoon and will arrive Monday in Falabisahaya. Every October to December, the western season brings heavy rains and windy weather, so there is no sea transportation activity. When I experienced this, I could not cross to Falabisahaya Island, and could only ask students to study independently by accessing online learning media through digital libraries and communicating through online media.

In the explanation of the results of the interview above, it can be seen how important the digital technology used by the Open University as a pioneer of distance education helps women in the small islands of North Maluku to have the opportunity to study at the Open University state university. Women's participation in small islands in North Maluku province to take part in distance education facilitated by digital technology. Distance education implemented by the Open University through digital technology has facilitated better access to education for women who previously had limited learning both in terms

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of tradition and geographically and economically in Sanana and Taliabu Islands, North Maluku. What women in the small islands of North Maluku experience through the Open University is to realize their desire to pursue higher education by using digital technology learning media so that they can continue to learn. Because distance education is a special and perfect form that combines elements of full-time, part-time and part-time education based on new information technologies and multimedia systems. Modern means of telecommunications and electronic publications make it possible to overcome the shortcomings of traditional forms of education, while retaining all their advantages. Distance learning embodies all existing teaching methods and gives them a whole new level (Khamidzhanovna & Rakhamatulaevna, 2022).

From not knowing how to use online learning media platforms, starting from elearning, accessing digital teaching materials, attending webinar tutorial classes, and many more digital technologies that women on the small island of North Maluku learn as a means of learning at the Open University. Online learning increases women's access to education. Online learning helps girls achieve their educational goals. In addition, it is seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals and ensure women's social, cultural and economic development around the world. Because online learning provides flexible learning opportunities that are open to everyone with the freedom of space and time, as well as facilitating education with the use of technology (Lesinger et al., 2022).

Strategies Implemented by Open University in Explaining Learning Platforms to Students.

The strategy implemented by the Open University in explaining the learning platform to students, namely with various digital learning technology media at the Open University. Starting from prospective students registering independently with mengakses.ut.ac.id, prospective students no longer need to come to the Open University regional representative office because with the use of digital technology, everything can be done from the prospective student's home. After becoming an Open University student, students will immediately get acquainted with elearning.ut.ac.id, rbv.ut.ac.id, lms.ut.ac.id, tmk.ac.id, the.ut.ac.id, and many more. The Open University's strategy in explaining the learning platform to students when participating in OSMB and PKBJJ activities when they are new students, so that they can be understood and used while being students at the Open University.

All platforms implemented at the Open University aim to make student services directly accessible to students. However, almost all digital technology learning services implemented by the Open University use internet access, so students are required to be in an area that has a network. Field findings found that not all regions have internet network infrastructure facilities, so it is one of the obstacles. As experienced by female students on the small islands of North Maluku. Where they have to cross the ocean or have to travel a long distance from where they live to get an internet network so that they can continue their studies.

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The location of our activity may be problematic with the existing infrastructure, for example the internet connection may be inconsistent and/or slow. For something like this, it is necessary to find solutions in digital technology-based learning (Hidayat & Khotimah, 2019). The solution to the obstacles experienced by women in the small islands of North Maluku is to make them stop learning, even as a motivation to continue studying together with friends. The experience gained by female students in the small islands of North Maluku is that when they study online, in lecture forums there are various kinds of students from other regions and can also meet tutors or lecturers and interact directly facilitated by digital learning service technology. Open University. Technological developments have played a crucial role in supporting the advancement of distance higher education. Continuous innovation in communication technology has pushed distance education approaches to the forefront of educational practice (Garrison, 2000). The development of modern information technology, such as the internet and web-based information technology, has greatly increased the potential impact of distance learning on the education delivery system (Buselic, 2012). These advancements have increased the power, speed, and accessibility of learning technologies, making distance education more feasible and effective (Leontyeva, 2018).

The obstacles experienced by digital technology are the limited signal that can be felt and also the geographical barriers that are obstacles. This is not only felt by women on small islands, but also by tutors or lecturers who when they want to travel to the teaching location, are hampered by the western monsoon weather, namely rain and sea breeze which means there is no sea transportation activity. However, with digital technology, tutors can communicate with students without meeting directly to remind students to continue learning with the availability of learning media platforms provided by the Open University. As for the efforts made by the Open University, if students experience problems, there are still online services or Open University staff visit the small islands of North Maluku to provide direct admission services such as new student registration in the archipelago, or student learning monitoring. , as well as providing test locations on small islands of North Maluku based on face-to-face exams.

CONCLUSIONS

Distance education has succeeded in creating learning opportunities for women in small islands to receive education in Indonesia. The Open University has provided the right platform for women who have high aspirations in achieving a quality of life through education. At a time when other universities are unable to provide a home for those who have limited access in various ways, the Open University appears at the forefront to overcome all these limitations. Become a learning model that no longer concerns distance, age and costs. All women in remote areas of the archipelago can easily enjoy good and quality educational services. With the help of digital technology, distance education makes women in small islands more flexible in terms of time. Distance education will also provide access and opportunities to obtain quality education, just like regular education in general. Distance education can be implemented in various forms, modes, scopes, and is supported by various educational facilities and services, making the participation of women on small islands in North Maluku province to take part in distance education facilitated by digital

technology. The implication of this research is that the importance of distance education can be an effective means for women to achieve educational equality in small island areas.

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