



Determinants of Twelfth-Grade Students' Intentions to Choose Distance Learning

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Abstract

This study examines the determinants of twelfth-grade students' intention to choose Universitas Terbuka (UT), with particular emphasis on perceived digital learning flexibility, perceived academic reputation, perceived employability, and brand trust. Using an explanatory quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design, the study collected empirical data from 428 twelfth-grade senior high school students from public and private schools. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS 4. The findings demonstrate that brand trust is the strongest predictor of choosing intention, followed by perceived digital learning flexibility, perceived employability, and perceived academic reputation. The model shows substantial explanatory power, explaining 61.2% of the variance in brand trust and 68.4% of the variance in enrolment intention. Mediation analysis further reveals that brand trust partially mediates the effects of flexibility, reputation, and employability on enrolment intention, indicating that favorable perceptions become more influential when translated into institutional trust. Findings suggest that UT's competitiveness depends not only on functional advantages such as flexibility and affordability, but also on its ability to build strong institutional trust among prospective students.

Introduction

Prospective students' perceptions represent a critical antecedent of higher education choice, particularly among twelfth-grade students who are approaching the transition from secondary education to university (Sinulingga et al., 2026; Freeman, 1997; Putri et al., 2025). At this stage, students begin to evaluate higher education institutions not only in terms of program availability, but also in relation to perceived institutional credibility, learning flexibility, academic quality, affordability, and expected career benefits. In the context of distance learning, such perceptions become particularly salient because students must assess whether a non-conventional learning mode can accommodate their academic needs, personal circumstances, digital readiness, and future aspirations. Accordingly, examining prospective students' perceptions is essential for understanding their intention to choose distance learning as a pathway to higher education (Punjani & Mahadewa, 2022; Osman et al., 2024; Lai et al., 2025).

The intensification of competition in the higher education sector has further increased the importance of understanding prospective students' expectations prior to enrolment. Higher education institutions are increasingly required to adopt a student-oriented and market-responsive approach in order to maintain institutional attractiveness, strengthen reputation, and improve enrolment outcomes. Hart et al. (2024) emphasized that higher education institutions operate within an increasingly competitive environment, while Stoica et al. (2025) argued that reputation management and stakeholder perceptions have become strategic concerns for

universities seeking to sustain their position in the academic marketplace. For institutions offering distance learning, competitiveness depends not only on the provision of flexible access, but also on the ability to establish legitimacy, communicate academic quality, and generate trust among prospective students.

Prior studies have demonstrated that students' perceptions of institutional quality, reputation, trust, and educational value are closely associated with their attitudes and behavioral responses toward higher education institutions. Herbert et al. (2022) showed that student perceptions can serve as a meaningful indicator of perceived teaching quality across countries, while De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2024) found that student satisfaction is strongly related to academic services, the learning environment, and the overall educational experience. Although these studies primarily examine students who are already enrolled in higher education, their findings remain relevant to the pre-enrolment stage because prospective students form expectations based on perceived institutional quality, public image, and anticipated learning experience. Similarly, Tessema et al. (2024) confirmed that student satisfaction and brand trust are important in promoting positive word of mouth, whereas Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) found that university reputation significantly influences student loyalty. These findings suggest that institutional reputation and trust constitute important evaluative mechanisms through which prospective students assess whether a university is worthy of consideration.

Distance learning has become increasingly relevant in response to digital transformation, social mobility, and the growing need for more flexible forms of higher education. Conventional university systems that require fixed schedules and physical attendance may not fully accommodate students who anticipate geographical constraints, financial limitations, family responsibilities, or the need to combine study with future employment. Consequently, digital learning flexibility is a central determinant of students' intention to choose distance learning. Kuluşaklı (2025) found that flexibility in content, teacher contact, and time is positively associated with student engagement in distance higher education, indicating that flexible learning systems can support persistence and participation in digital learning environments. For twelfth-grade students, the perception that distance learning provides greater control over time, place, pace, and access may increase its perceived suitability as a viable higher education option.

In addition to flexibility, perceived academic reputation and perceived employability are critical factors in shaping prospective students' intention to choose distance learning. Students and their families are likely to evaluate whether a distance learning institution possesses academic legitimacy, public recognition, and the capacity to support future career outcomes. This consideration is particularly important because distance learning may still be subject to different levels of social acceptance when compared with conventional face-to-face higher education. Juhaidi (2024) found that institutional reputation, employment opportunities, brand recognition, and facilities significantly influence university choice. Likewise, Mendoza-Villafaina and López-Mosquera (2024) showed that students' perceptions of the usefulness of their educational experience for future professional development positively affect university satisfaction and institutional reputation. These findings indicate that intention to choose distance learning is not determined solely by flexibility, but also by the extent to which the institution is perceived as reputable, credible, and relevant to future employability.

Brand trust is also an essential construct in explaining prospective students' intention to choose distance learning. Since distance learning relies extensively on digital platforms, self-directed learning, institutional support systems, and mediated interaction, prospective students require confidence that the institution is capable of delivering reliable academic services and

maintaining educational quality. Trust reduces perceived uncertainty and strengthens students' willingness to consider a higher education institution as a credible option. In this regard, brand trust may function as an important mechanism linking perceptions of flexibility, academic reputation, and employability with enrolment intention. When prospective students trust the institution, favorable perceptions of distance learning are more likely to be translated into stronger intention to enrol.

Based on this rationale, the present study examines the determinants of twelfth-grade senior high school students' intentions to choose distance learning at UT. Specifically, the study investigates perceived digital learning flexibility, perceived academic reputation, perceived employability, and brand trust as predictors of enrolment intention. This focus is theoretically and practically important because enrolment intention is formed prior to actual university entry and is influenced by prospective students' evaluation of learning systems, institutional credibility, career relevance, and trustworthiness. By examining these determinants, the study contributes to the literature on higher education choice and distance learning adoption, while also providing strategic insights for UT in strengthening institutional attractiveness, building trust among future students, and positioning distance learning as an accessible, flexible, credible, and career-relevant pathway in an increasingly competitive higher education environment.

Methods

This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate when the objective is to examine relationships among variables using data collected at a single point in time. Although cross-sectional data should be interpreted carefully when discussing causal direction, this approach remains suitable for assessing predictive relationships among prospective students' perceptions, brand trust, and enrolment intention in the higher education context (Maier et al., 2023; Slater et al., 2024).

The population of this study comprised twelfth-grade senior high school students who were in the stage of considering and deciding whether to pursue higher education. A total of 428 responses were obtained from students attending both public and private senior high schools. The sample consisted of 261 female students, representing 61.0% of respondents, and 167 male students, representing 39.0%. In terms of school type, 247 respondents, or 57.7%, were from public senior high schools, while 181 respondents, or 42.3%, were from private senior high schools. In addition, 71.5% of respondents reported that they had heard of UT before completing the questionnaire. These characteristics indicate that the study was based on empirical responses from prospective higher education students and provides a relevant basis for examining the determinants of enrolment intention toward UT.

The sampling procedure was designed to capture respondent heterogeneity across school types. Schools were considered based on their status as public or private institutions, and respondents were selected from twelfth-grade students because they represent a relevant group for examining university choice intention. At this stage, students are approaching the transition from secondary to higher education and are therefore more likely to evaluate available university options. The inclusion of students from both public and private schools strengthens the empirical relevance of the study by reducing the dominance of a single school category. This sampling logic is consistent with established survey principles suggesting that stratified and multistage sampling approaches can improve efficiency and representativeness in educational and social research (Aubry et al., 2023; Cohen et al., 2018).

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Five-point Likert-type scales are widely used in higher education and social science research because they provide a practical and interpretable format for capturing respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions (Alotaibi et al., 2024; Iskandar et al., 2024). Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility was measured using four indicators reflecting flexibility in study time, access to learning materials, learning pace, and compatibility with students' activities. Perceived Academic Reputation was measured using four indicators related to UT's credibility as a public university, perceived academic quality, and institutional standing. Perceived Employability was measured using four indicators related to work readiness, skill relevance, and future career prospects. Brand Trust was measured using four indicators concerning reliability, honesty, consistency of quality, and confidence in UT as a higher education institution. Enrolment Intention was measured using four indicators representing willingness to consider UT, seek further information about UT, apply to UT, and regard UT as a realistic university option.

The empirical data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling approach. SmartPLS 4 supports contemporary PLS-SEM procedures suitable for examining complex relationships among latent constructs (Cheah et al., 2024). The analysis included descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation, structural model evaluation, and mediation testing. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. The structural model was evaluated using collinearity assessment, path coefficients, bootstrapping, coefficient of determination, effect size, and predictive relevance. Mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether brand trust mediated the relationships between perceived digital learning flexibility, perceived academic reputation, perceived employability, and enrolment intention. Recent methodological literature recommends PLS-SEM for studies involving multiple latent constructs, prediction-oriented objectives, and mediation analysis, particularly in management, marketing, and education research, while also emphasizing the importance of careful model assessment and robustness checks (Sarstedt et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2024; Vaithilingam et al., 2024). Overall, this analytical approach is appropriate for examining direct and indirect relationships among perceptions, trust, and intention in the context of higher education choice.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Profile

The study involved 428 respondents, consisting of 261 female students, or 61.0%, and 167 male students, or 39.0%. In terms of school type, 247 respondents, or 57.7%, were from public senior high schools, while 181 respondents, or 42.3%, were from private senior high schools. Most respondents were already familiar with UT prior to completing the survey, as 306 respondents, or 71.5%, reported that they had heard of UT. However, only 165 respondents, or 38.6%, included UT in their initial university choice set. This pattern suggests that UT has achieved relatively high awareness among prospective students, but awareness has not yet been fully translated into early-stage university choice consideration.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	261	61.0
	Male	167	39.0

School type	Public senior high school	247	57.7
	Private senior high school	181	42.3
Prior familiarity with UT	Familiar with UT before survey	306	71.5
Initial university consideration	Included UT in initial choice set	165	38.6

Source: Survey Data.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, ranging from 0.716 to 0.884, thereby supporting indicator reliability. Internal consistency reliability was also established, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.791 to 0.873 and composite reliability values ranging from 0.861 to 0.913. Convergent validity was supported by average variance extracted values ranging from 0.564 to 0.725, all exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.50. Discriminant validity was confirmed because all HTMT values were below 0.85. In addition, the SRMR value of 0.057 indicated an acceptable overall model fit. Taken together, these results indicate that the measurement model was reliable and valid for subsequent structural model assessment.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Criterion	Reported Value	Threshold	Conclusion
Outer loading	0.716–0.884	> 0.70	Acceptable
Cronbach's alpha	0.791–0.873	> 0.70	Reliable
Composite reliability	0.861–0.913	> 0.70	Reliable
AVE	0.564–0.725	> 0.50	Convergent validity established
HTMT	< 0.85	< 0.85	Discriminant validity established
SRMR	0.057	< 0.08	Good model fit

Source: Analyzed Data.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model showed strong explanatory power. Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Academic Reputation, and Perceived Employability explained 61.2% of the variance in Brand Trust. Furthermore, Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Academic Reputation, Perceived Employability, and Brand Trust jointly explained 68.4% of the variance in Enrolment Intention toward UT. The Q^2 values for Brand Trust and Enrolment Intention were 0.403 and 0.431, respectively, indicating good predictive relevance. These findings suggest that the proposed model has adequate predictive capability in explaining prospective students' trust in UT and their intention to choose UT as a higher education option.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2	Interpretation
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Brand Trust	0.612	0.403	Substantial explanatory power and good predictive relevance
Enrolment Intention toward UT	0.684	0.431	Strong explanatory power and good predictive relevance

Source: Analyzed Data.

The relative strength of the predictors indicates that Brand Trust had the strongest total effect on Enrolment Intention, followed by Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Employability, and Perceived Academic Reputation. This pattern shows that prospective students' intention to choose UT is influenced most strongly by the extent to which they trust the institution. At the same time, perceptions of learning flexibility, career relevance, and academic reputation also contribute positively to enrolment intention.

Table 4. Relative Strength of Predictors of Enrolment Intention

Predictor	Standardized Total Effect	Importance
Brand Trust	0.412	Strongest predictor
Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility	0.276	Strong
Perceived Employability	0.214	Moderate to strong
Perceived Academic Reputation	0.167	Moderate

Source: Analyzed Data.

These results indicate that the most decisive factor is not simply whether prospective students are aware of UT, but whether they perceive UT as a credible, reliable, and future-relevant institution. The positive contribution of Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility confirms that flexibility is a central value proposition in distance learning. For twelfth-grade students who are considering higher education options, flexibility may reduce perceived barriers related to time, location, learning pace, and compatibility with future personal or professional responsibilities. At the same time, Perceived Academic Reputation functions as an important signal of institutional quality, particularly for prospective students who have not yet had direct experience with the university.

The contribution of Perceived Employability further suggests that prospective students evaluate higher education pragmatically. Their decision-making is not limited to institutional image or accessibility, but also includes the perceived career relevance of the institution. This finding implies that UT's communication strategy should not only emphasize flexibility and access, but also highlight program relevance, graduate capabilities, and the potential contribution of UT education to future career development.

Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis showed that Brand Trust mediated the effects of Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Academic Reputation, and Perceived Employability on Enrolment Intention toward UT. All indirect effects were statistically significant at $p < .001$, indicating that prospective students' perceptions of flexibility, academic reputation, and employability became more influential when these perceptions were translated into trust in the institution. The variance accounted for values ranged from 44.9% to 48.5%, confirming partial

mediation. This means that the three antecedent constructs had both direct effects on enrolment intention and indirect effects through Brand Trust.

More specifically, Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility had a direct effect of 0.152 and an indirect effect of 0.124 through Brand Trust, resulting in a total effect of 0.276. Perceived Academic Reputation had a direct effect of 0.086 and an indirect effect of 0.081, producing a total effect of 0.167. Perceived Employability had a direct effect of 0.117 and an indirect effect of 0.097, yielding a total effect of 0.214. These findings indicate that although flexibility, academic reputation, and employability directly contribute to prospective students' intention to choose UT, their influence becomes stronger when students develop trust in the university.

Table 5. Mediation Results

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect via Brand Trust	t-value	p-value	Total Effect	VAF	Mediation Type
Digital Learning Flexibility → Enrolment Intention	0.152	0.124	4.982	< .001	0.276	44.9%	Partial mediation
Academic Reputation → Enrolment Intention	0.086	0.081	3.764	< .001	0.167	48.5%	Partial mediation
Perceived Employability → Enrolment Intention	0.117	0.097	4.215	< .001	0.214	45.3%	Partial mediation

Source: Analyzed data (2025).

Overall, the findings indicate that Brand Trust is a key mechanism linking prospective students' evaluations of flexibility, reputation, and employability to their enrolment intention. In practical terms, UT should prioritize trust-building communication by emphasizing institutional credibility, consistent academic quality, reliable learning support, and the relevance of its programs to future career opportunities. Such efforts are important for converting awareness and favorable perceptions into stronger intention to enrol. The findings also suggest that distance learning will be more attractive to prospective students when flexibility is supported by credible institutional positioning, clear academic value, and strong career relevance.

The findings of this study indicate that twelfth-grade students' intention to choose distance learning is shaped not merely by institutional awareness, but by a more complex evaluative process involving trust, flexibility, employability, and academic reputation. The gap between students who had heard of Universitas Terbuka and those who included it in their initial university choice set suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to generate enrolment intention. This finding is consistent with Hart et al. (2024), who emphasized that higher education choice increasingly occurs within a competitive market where students compare institutions based on perceived value, credibility, and future benefits. Similarly, Stoica et al. (2025) argued that university reputation must be actively managed because prospective

students rely on institutional signals when they lack direct experience with the university. In the Indonesian context, Juhaidi (2024) also found that university choice is influenced by employment opportunities, institutional reputation, facilities, and brand recognition. Therefore, UT's challenge is not only to increase visibility among prospective students, but also to convert that visibility into perceived institutional credibility and serious consideration.

Brand trust emerged as the most influential factor in explaining enrolment intention. This finding suggests that prospective students are more likely to consider distance learning when they believe that the institution is reliable, academically credible, and capable of delivering consistent educational quality. This aligns with Tessema et al. (2024), who demonstrated that brand trust plays an important role in strengthening positive student responses toward higher education institutions. In the context of distance learning, trust is especially important because students must make decisions without fully experiencing the learning system beforehand. Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) similarly showed that university reputation and brand-related perceptions contribute to student loyalty, indicating that trust becomes a bridge between institutional image and behavioral intention. Thus, the present study extends previous findings by showing that trust is already decisive at the pre-enrolment stage, before students become actual university students.

The positive effect of perceived digital learning flexibility confirms that flexibility remains a central value proposition of distance higher education. For twelfth-grade students, flexibility may reduce perceived barriers related to time, location, pace of learning, and the possibility of combining study with other responsibilities. Kuluşaklı (2025) found that flexibility in content, time, and teacher contact supports student engagement in distance learning. This means that flexibility should not be communicated only as an administrative convenience, but as a learning condition that enables students to manage their academic progress more independently. Alotaibi et al. (2024) also showed that students' learning experiences and satisfaction are closely related to how they perceive the educational environment and service delivery. Therefore, UT needs to present digital flexibility as a structured and supported learning experience rather than simply as "studying from anywhere."

The finding that perceived employability contributes positively to enrolment intention indicates that students evaluate higher education pragmatically. They do not only ask whether a university is accessible, but also whether it can support their future work readiness and career prospects. Mendoza-Villafaina and López-Mosquera (2024) showed that students' perception of the usefulness of their educational experience for professional development contributes to satisfaction and institutional reputation. This supports the present finding that employability strengthens the attractiveness of UT as a distance learning institution. Iskandar et al. (2024) also emphasized that perceived value in higher education is formed when students see a meaningful connection between educational services and personal or professional benefits. Therefore, UT's enrolment strategy should clearly communicate graduate competencies, career relevance, alumni pathways, and the practical value of its academic programs.

Although perceived academic reputation had a smaller effect than brand trust, flexibility, and employability, it remains an important determinant of enrolment intention. Academic reputation functions as a quality signal, particularly for prospective students who have not yet experienced university learning directly. Herbert et al. (2022) explained that student perceptions can serve as meaningful indicators of perceived teaching quality across educational systems. This suggests that students' judgments about academic reputation are not superficial; they reflect expectations about teaching quality, institutional seriousness, and learning outcomes. De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2024) further showed that satisfaction in higher education

is influenced by academic services, capacity development, and environmental factors. In this study, academic reputation may have a more indirect role: it strengthens trust and reduces uncertainty rather than independently dominating students' enrolment intention.

The mediation results provide an important theoretical implication: flexibility, reputation, and employability become more persuasive when they are translated into institutional trust. In other words, students may perceive UT as flexible, reputable, or career-relevant, but these perceptions are more likely to influence enrolment intention when they also believe that UT can consistently deliver what it promises. This finding supports the logic of higher education branding proposed by Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024), where reputation and institutional credibility shape stronger relational outcomes. It also aligns with Tessema et al. (2024), who positioned brand trust as a mediating mechanism between perceived quality and positive behavioral responses. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that brand trust is not simply another predictor, but a strategic mechanism through which institutional attributes become meaningful for prospective students.

The strong explanatory power of the model also suggests that the selected variables are relevant for understanding distance learning choice among prospective students. This is important because many studies on higher education perception focus on enrolled students, while this study examines students before university entry. Hart et al. (2024) highlighted the need to understand institutional choice from the perspective of prospective students, especially in increasingly competitive higher education markets. The present findings answer this concern by showing that pre-enrolment intention is shaped by students' interpretation of institutional reliability, learning flexibility, academic legitimacy, and career relevance. From a methodological perspective, the use of PLS-SEM is appropriate because the model involves multiple latent constructs and mediation pathways. Hair et al. (2024), Sarstedt et al. (2024), and Vaithilingam et al. (2024) emphasized that PLS-SEM is suitable for prediction-oriented models, provided that measurement validity, reliability, and robustness are carefully assessed.

Practically, these findings imply that UT should move beyond general promotion and develop a more trust-centered communication strategy. The relatively high level of prior familiarity with UT, compared with the lower proportion of students who included UT in their initial choice set, indicates that institutional awareness has not been fully converted into enrolment consideration. UT should therefore communicate concrete evidence of academic quality, learning support, accreditation, graduate outcomes, and the reliability of its digital learning system. Cheah et al. (2024) noted that contemporary PLS-SEM applications are useful for identifying the relative importance of predictors in complex behavioral models. In this study, the relative strength of brand trust suggests that trust-building should be treated as the core of UT's recruitment strategy, while flexibility, reputation, and employability should be framed as evidence that reinforces trust.

Conclusion

This study examined the determinants of twelfth-grade senior high school students' intention to choose distance learning at Universitas Terbuka. Specifically, the study analyzed the roles of Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Academic Reputation, Perceived Employability, and Brand Trust in shaping Enrolment Intention. Using empirical survey data from 428 prospective students, the findings demonstrate that the proposed model has strong explanatory power in explaining both Brand Trust and Enrolment Intention.

The results show that Brand Trust is the strongest predictor of Enrolment Intention. This finding indicates that prospective students' decision to consider UT is influenced not only by their awareness of the institution, but also by the extent to which they perceive UT as credible, reliable, and capable of delivering quality higher education through distance learning. Trust therefore plays a central role in reducing uncertainty and strengthening students' willingness to choose UT as a realistic higher education option.

Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility also contributes positively to Enrolment Intention, confirming that flexibility remains a major value proposition of distance learning. For twelfth-grade students, the ability to study with greater flexibility in terms of time, place, pace, and access increases the perceived attractiveness of UT. In addition, Perceived Employability has a positive effect on Enrolment Intention, indicating that prospective students evaluate higher education not only from the perspective of accessibility, but also from its perceived relevance to future career opportunities. Perceived Academic Reputation further supports enrolment intention, although its effect is relatively smaller than those of Brand Trust, Digital Learning Flexibility, and Employability.

The mediation analysis confirms that Brand Trust partially mediates the effects of Perceived Digital Learning Flexibility, Perceived Academic Reputation, and Perceived Employability on Enrolment Intention. This means that favorable perceptions of flexibility, reputation, and employability influence students' intention both directly and indirectly through trust. In other words, these institutional attributes become more persuasive when they strengthen students' trust in UT. Overall, the findings suggest that building trust is a strategic mechanism for converting prospective students' positive perceptions into stronger enrolment intention.

This study contributes to the literature on higher education choice and distance learning adoption by highlighting the importance of trust in the pre-enrolment decision-making process. In the context of distance learning, where prospective students may not yet have direct experience with the institution, trust becomes especially important. The findings also provide practical insight for Universitas Terbuka in strengthening its positioning as an accessible, flexible, credible, and career-relevant public university.

Several practical suggestions can be proposed. First, UT should strengthen trust-building strategies in its communication with prospective students. Since Brand Trust emerged as the strongest determinant of Enrolment Intention, institutional communication should consistently emphasize UT's credibility as a public university, the reliability of its distance learning system, the quality of its academic services, and its long-standing experience in open and distance higher education.

Second, UT should communicate digital learning flexibility more clearly and concretely. Promotional and outreach activities should not only state that UT is flexible, but should explain how flexibility works in practice, including flexible study schedules, access to digital learning materials, learning support systems, and compatibility with students' personal circumstances. This is important because prospective students may understand flexibility differently, and clear communication can help them perceive distance learning as a realistic and manageable pathway to higher education.

Third, UT should strengthen the employability narrative in its institutional positioning. Since Perceived Employability positively influences enrolment intention, UT needs to highlight the relevance of its programs to future career development, skill formation, professional mobility, and lifelong learning. Information about graduate competencies, alumni experiences, career

pathways, and program relevance to the labor market can help prospective students and their families view distance learning as a valuable investment for the future.

Fourth, UT should continue to reinforce its academic reputation among prospective students. As students who have not yet entered higher education often rely on external signals when evaluating a university, UT should communicate its public university status, academic quality assurance, accreditation, lecturer competence, learning resources, and institutional achievements more systematically. Strengthening academic reputation can support trust formation and improve UT's competitiveness in the higher education market.

Fifth, UT's recruitment and outreach strategies should focus not only on increasing awareness, but also on converting awareness into serious consideration. The findings show that although many respondents were familiar with UT, fewer included UT in their initial university choice set. Therefore, UT should develop more targeted communication strategies for twelfth-grade students, school counselors, teachers, and parents. These strategies should address common concerns about distance learning, provide clear information about study mechanisms, and present UT as a credible and future-oriented university option.

Finally, future studies may extend this research by involving broader geographical coverage, comparing prospective students from different regions, or examining additional factors such as parental influence, digital readiness, perceived affordability, social norms, and perceived ease of learning. Longitudinal research may also be useful to examine whether enrolment intention among prospective students eventually translates into actual enrolment behavior. Such extensions would provide a deeper understanding of how prospective students evaluate distance learning and how higher education institutions can design more effective strategies to attract future learners.

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