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## Views of High School Students About Distance Education

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### Abstract

In recent years with the developments in information technologies, use of distance education at higher education institutions has expanded. Learners can choose a specific higher education institution due to several reasons. Research states that such a preference is based on several factors, including status of the institution, geographical status of the university, recommendations by individuals (family members, teachers, peers, etc.), interest of learners, future job opportunities, success of university, social opportunities of the city and availability of evening education courses. The major factor in successful distance education is learners. More specifically, the demographical qualities, interests and attitudes of students play a major role in distance education. The views of the high school graduates preparing for university entrance examination about distance education have not been analysed. This study aims at uncovering the views of high school students preparing for university entrance examination about distance education and their motivations for choosing distance education institutions. The data of the study were collected through a survey consisting of 36 likert scale questions. It was administered to 223 high school students. The findings state that most of the students don't want to choose a program in distance education. Nearly half of the participants reported that instead of choosing a distance education program in a high-quality institution, they might prefer the same program in an ordinary university. Another finding shows that only 22% of the participants planned to enrol for a two-year higher education. However, in Turkey distance education programs are vastly common in these institutions. Nearly half of the participants reported that major advantages of distance education (efficient time management, easy communication, low cost, courses by specialists, etc.) were not beneficial for them. Nearly 60% of the students reported that their choice over distance education would not be supported by guidance teachers, family members and friends. Therefore, these key -groups should be taken into consideration by distance education institutions in their promotional and advertising activities.

**Key words:** distance education, choosing course, choosing university, university entrance examination

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## **Introduction**

The number of universities implementing the distance education system has increased thanks to the developments in information technologies around the world in recent years. In this study, distance education is defined as an institutional internet based education system in which student and teacher are separated by space and there are no restrictions on time and space (Altan & Seferoğlu, 2009; Baturay & Bay, 2009). The benefits of distance education can be counted as providing educational opportunities by means of information technologies to those who cannot benefit from formal education environment, improving the quality of service of institutions with in-service trainings and accessing to expert knowledge more economically (Gündüz et al., 2014; Kandemir, 2014).

According to 2015 ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center) data, state universities have a quota of 340.197 undergraduate programs and 308.584 associate degree programs while private universities have a quota of 79.959 undergraduate programs and 74.006 associate degree programs. As for distance education programs, state universities have a quota of 1560 undergraduate programs and 5163 associate degree programs while private universities have a quota of 470 undergraduate programs and 1290 associate degree programs. The undergraduate programs in distance teaching public universities are the Departments of Business Administration, Economics, Public Administration, Political Science, Public Relations and Publicity, Labor Economics and Industrial Relations, Public Finance, Journalism, Radio-Television and Cinema while the undergraduate programs in distance teaching private universities are the Departments of Management Information Systems, Healthcare Management, Computer Engineering and Industrial Engineering. The associate degree programs in distance teaching public universities are the departments of Computer Programming, Child Development, Electronic Communication Technology, Accounting and Taxation, Computer Technology, Mapping and Cadastre, Electric, Internet and Network Technology, Mechatronics, Medical Documentation and Secretary Training, Jurisprudence, Banking and Insurance, Tourism and Hotel Management, Business Management, Railroad Transportation Management, Emergency and Disaster Management, Geographic Information Systems and Technologies, Occupational Health and Safety, Foreign Trade, Marketing, Fashion Design, Call Center Services, Management of Healthcare Institutions, Control and Automation Technologies, Human Resource Management, Forestry and Forest Products, Media and Communication, Postal Services. The associate degree programs in distance teaching private universities are the Departments of Cookery, Foreign Trade, Child Development, Graphic Design, Medical Documentation and Secretary Training, Local Governments, Tourist Guiding. As a result of 2016 Undergraduate Placement Exam (LYS) in Turkey, about 2000 students are accepted into distance education undergraduate programs while about 10000 students are accepted to distance education associate degree programs.

When present studies are analysed, it is seen that students prefer a higher education institution for many reasons. These reasons are the university's academic prestige, its geographical location, locality of the city where the university is located, university's success in the projects, the availability of evening education in the university, counselling (by family, teacher, friends etc.), personal interests and better job prospects (Akar, 2012; Cerit et al., 2007; Çiftçi et al., 2011; Yılmaz, 2012).

In a study by Işık, Karakış, and Güler (2010), which focuses on students' opinions towards web based distance education, questionnaire was conducted on 64 distance education graduate students. Research findings revealed that students have a positive attitude towards

distance education. Female students have more positive attitudes toward distance education than male counterparts and students find distance education more comfortable and effective than traditional education. However, students also stated that studying on the web is dull.

Karabacak (2013) conducted a study in which 24 graduate distance education students were questioned about distance education and semi-structured interviews were used as data collection method. In the study, 11 of 24 students stated that they feel free thanks to time flexibility and 10 of the 24 students appreciated sharing of lecture notes and sources. However, 12 students stated inability to find immediate answers to the questions arise during studying as a negative statement.

A qualitative study was conducted by Aktürk, Şahin, and Sünbül (2008) to examine what prospective teachers of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies Department think about web based education. The features that should be in web based education environments, the ways to increase efficiency and the use of web based education and the way the interaction is provided were examined in the study.

Birişçi's study (2013), conducted with prospective teachers, aimed on the examination of the Department of Sociology students' attitudes and opinions towards video conference based distance education. During the study, a 10-week video conference based distance education was provided to 41 students. At the end of the week, participants completed a questionnaire of 35 items in the form of five point likert and Vision Assessment Form. It was found that Items loaded on one factor. The students' attitude towards distance education was mediocre (2,61–3,4). The results reveal that the students' negative opinions towards distance education outweigh the positive ones. Having an opportunity to meet different teachers, arousing interest in the classes and teaching in a different method rather than traditional education can be seen as positive opinions towards distance education while lack of communication, technical problems and lack of concentration towards the lesson can be seen as negative ones.

Another study carried out by Yalman and Kutluca (2013), which focuses on prospective Math teachers' opinions towards distance education, concluded that there was no significant difference in teachers' attitude towards distance education based on the gender of students, the education program they have and the way the lessons are taught. In the studies conducted with undergraduate students, the attitudes of students are closer neither agree or disagree, in other words mediocre (Ateş & Altun, 2008; Brinkerhoff & Koroghlanian, 2005). Furthermore, other studies concluded that students had particularly positive attitudes towards the opportunity to study place and time independent (Belcheir & Cucek, 2002), access course materials readily (Drennan et al., 2005), individuality and ease of use (Chang & Tung, 2008).

The main element that makes distance education successful is the student (Gündüz et al., 2014). The demographic features of students, their interests and attitudes are among the factors that affect distance education (Ateş & Altun, 2008). As a consequence of prevalent use of distance education in higher education, education level and economic growth in the society are expected to develop (Kandemir, 2014). When other studies in the literature are examined, it is seen that studies are mostly conducted on undergraduate and graduate students' opinions towards distance education. As well as studies that focus on the effect of web based education on the success and attitude of students (Alper & Deryakulu, 2010), there are some studies that examine high school students' attitudes towards distance education and their

psychological reasons (Katz, 2002). However, no study about what high school students think about distance education is encountered.

The reasons why students, examined in this study, prefer distance education have a relationship with Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Theory of the Diffusion of Innovations. Davis (1989) developed Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is composed of external factors, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude, behavioural intention and usage. Behavioural intention is directly connected to user behaviour.

Theory of the Diffusion of Innovations developed by Rogers (1995) consists of four main elements such as the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. Communication Channels element includes five steps which are knowledge, persuasion, decision, practice and confirmation. In this study, whether people prefer distance education or not is connected to Decision step which is about adoption or rejection. Decision step is related to steps of practice and confirmation. In brief, whether people prefer distance education or not, in other words; their intention, can indicate their adoption distance education. This study is thought to contribute to the literature within this respect.

The aim of this study is to determine what students preparing for the university entrance exam think about distance education and reasons for their preferences. To this end, these research questions are investigated:

- (1) Do students consider distance education as a preference for higher education?
- (2) What are the factors that affect student preferences?

## Method

### *Samples*

223 students from different high schools in Turkey completed the questionnaire developed by the researchers. The features of samples are presented in Table 1.

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Female	107	47,8
	Male	115	51,3
<b>Type of School</b>	Vocational High School	91	40,6
	High School	96	42,8
	Other	35	15,6
<b>Employment</b>	Employed	33	14,7
	Unemployed	185	82,6
<b>Preference of Associate Degree Programs</b>	Yes	47	21,0
	No	166	74,1
<b>The number of times the University Entrance Exam taken</b>	Once	148	66,1
	Twice	62	27,7
	Three times	13	6,2
<b>Internet Connection</b>	Yes	143	65,8
	No	78	34,2

## Data Collection and Data Analysis

The questionnaire has two parts. The first part includes such items as gender and the school from which students graduate and the latter part includes 32 items in the form of five point likert. Items are designed as 1=Completely disagree ..... 5=Completely agree. Collected data are evaluated by taking percentage and frequency rates into consideration.

## Findings

63 percent of students stated that they would not prefer distance education. Only 18 percent of them stated that they could study in distance education programs (Table 2). This result shows that students first choice of undergraduate degree is not distance education programs.

**Table 2** – Frequency and percentage of the item “I certainly would like to study in a distance education program”

	n	%
Completely Disagree	78	35,0
<i>Disagree</i>	63	28,3
Undecided	41	18,4
<i>Agree</i>	21	9,4
Completely Disagree	20	9,0

In addition, 48 percent of students stated that they prefer a mediocre formal education program to a better distance education program (Table 3).

**Table 3** – Frequency and percentage of the item “I prefer a good distance education program to a mediocre formal education program”

	n	%
Completely Disagree	33	14,9
<i>Disagree</i>	75	33,8
Undecided	55	24,8
<i>Agree</i>	40	18,0
Completely Disagree	19	8,6

30 percent of students reported that they are undecided about distance education being time independent, 53 percent of them have negative opinions while 16 percent have positive opinions. Opinions about distance education being place independent are no different from this data (Table 4). This study also revealed that students do not have enough information about advantages of distance education. It is striking that they do not also have enough information about the most significant advantage of distance education being place and time independent.

**Table 4**– Frequency and percentage of the item “Distance education being place and time independent”

	time		place	
	n	%	n	%
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	46	20,9	47	21,6
<i>Disagree</i>	71	32,3	70	32,1
<i>Undecided</i>	66	30,0	66	30,3
<i>Agree</i>	21	9,5	23	10,6
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	16	7,3	12	5,5

As external factors are thought to affect preferences of students on distance education, the effect of these factors are also investigated in three items such as “the effect of teachers, family and friends”. Majority of students think that they will not be supported about distance education by other people. Data related to these three items are found to be closer to each other. Besides, the percentage of undecided students is high (Table 5). This result indicates that students did not talk about distance education programs within their circle of friends, family or teachers at all.

**Table 5** – Frequency and percentage of the item “Support from external factors such as teachers, family and friends”

	teacher		family		friend	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	48	21,9	64	29,2	57	26,4
<i>Disagree</i>	65	29,7	62	28,3	68	31,5
<i>Undecided</i>	73	33,3	64	29,2	60	27,8
<i>Agree</i>	20	9,1	19	8,7	20	9,3
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	13	5,9	10	4,6	11	5,1

The most important item showing the lack of information about distance education is the following one “I searched if the department, I would like to study at university, is a distance education program or not.” Table 6 presents that only 19 percent of students searched about the distance education programs in Turkey.

**Table 6** – Frequency and percentage of the item “I searched if the department, I would like to study at university, is a distance education program or not.”

	n	%
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	54	24,4
<i>DISAGREE</i>	72	32,6
<i>Undecided</i>	53	24,0
<i>AGREE</i>	23	10,4
<i>Completely Disagree</i>	19	8,6

## Conclusions And Suggestions

It is revealed that students preparing for university entrance exam in Turkey have negative behavioural intention towards distance education programs in higher education and also majority of them reject the adoption of distance education. In the study carried out by Kirby, Barbour and Sharpe (2012), it is evident the students have negative opinions towards

distance education programs in higher education. These findings conclude that students have not adopted the distance education yet. The most important reason of this rejection is the lack of information about distance education. If this need is fulfilled, distance education will be affected positively.

While 63 percent of students do not prefer distance education, 18 percent of them prefer it. In addition, nearly half of the students stated that they prefer a mediocre formal education program to a good distance education program. Research finding reveal that 51 percent of students would like to study Medicine, Engineering and Teaching and these departments have no or few distance education programs or students do not have enough information about the programs. These can be counted among the reasons why distance education is not preferred. At the same time, although distance education in Turkey is prevalent in associate degree programs, only 22 percent of students stated that they prefer associate degree programs.

Half of the students are prejudicious about the advantages of distance education (using time efficiently, easier communication, low cost, accessing the expert knowledge etc.) mentioned in the literature and they consider that these do not contribute them. This shows that they have no information about the latest improvements and how technology affect or improve education.

Nearly 60 percent of students speculated that they will have no support from their teachers, family and friends about their preference of distance education programs. According to the studies in the literature, online learning is affected from external factors (Kirby et al., 2012). That's why, institutions and organizations implementing distance education need to plan their publicity and advertising strategies accordingly.

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