

Measurement Of The Level Of Acceptability Of Unpaz Academics To The Resolution Of The Government Of Timor Leste Regarding The Suspension Of Doctoral Study Programs

Antoninho Benjamin Marcos M.G. Do Rego Galaciano^{1*}, Sutoyo², Ahmad Zainuddin³, Lintang Suminar⁴, Siti Nur Soleha⁵

^{1*-5}Master of Management Study Program, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Artha Bodhi Iswara, Indonesia
 Email: ^{1*)} abemorio_medicine@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The Government of Timor-Leste's decision to suspend doctoral programs has elicited varied responses from academics concerning their perception, participation, and acceptance of the policy. This study aims to analyze the influence of academics' perception and participation on their acceptance of the doctoral program closure policy. Employing a quantitative approach, the research involved 257 academics from UNPAZ, selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM to test direct and mediating effects among variables, complemented by non-parametric analyses (Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney, and logistic regression) to examine differences across demographic groups. The findings reveal that academics' perception and participation simultaneously exert a significant effect on policy acceptability. Academics with higher education and greater academic engagement, such as lecturers and postgraduate students, demonstrated lower levels of acceptability compared to undergraduate students and administrative staff. Non-parametric results further confirmed significant differences based on age, educational level, and academic status. Overall, academics' acceptability of the doctoral program closure policy is relatively low and influenced by both perception and active participation, with higher educational attainment associated with more critical attitudes toward the policy. Therefore, it is recommended that the Government of Timor-Leste improve transparent communication and participatory mechanisms to foster positive perceptions and stronger policy support, while encouraging academics to take a more active role in the policy-making process.

Keywords: Academics Perception, Academics Participation, Academics Acceptability, PLS SEM, Non-Parametric, Higher Education Policy, Timor Leste

1. Introduction

In a democratic state order, every public policy must not only be legally valid, but must also be acceptable to the wider community and legitimate (Montesquieu & de Secondat et al., 1899). The tension between legality and legitimacy is often an issue when the policies taken by the government focus only on the formal legal process (Cao, 2024), without involving the main stakeholders affected (Melkevick, 2023). One of the important aspects involving state and government policies is education, especially higher education. Higher education is a strategic pillar in human resource development in every country, including Timor-Leste Leste which is



a small country in the relatively young Southeast Asian region that achieved full independence from Indonesia in 2002 after a long and complex conflict (Ximenes, 2022). In the context of developing countries that are still building institutional foundations and academic quality, the existence of higher education institutions has a central position as one of the national development agendas and the achievement of long-term goals (Sousa Saldanha et al., 2024; Ximenes, 2022). Therefore, any policy that concerns the management of higher education, both in terms of the opening and closing of study programs, requires prudence and sensitivity to the aspirations and social conditions of the community (Ruben et al., 2023) (Levy, 2024). In an effort to build the country, higher education is an important pillar in the human resource development strategy (Dewey, 2001). Along with the spirit of national reconstruction, various institutions of higher education, both public and private, are thriving throughout the region of Timor Leste. Universities such as UNTL (National University of Timor Lorosa'e), UNPAZ (University of Peace), DIT (Dili Institute of Technology), and UNDIL (Dili University) as well as dozens of other private universities, have played a significant role in improving access to education and producing graduates who contribute to the country's development process (Austin & Jones, 2024).

Academics from various private universities who were exposed to the policy assessed that the policy was carried out unilaterally without adequate public dialogue. Academics are not involved in the process related to the policy. This is what causes the emergence of various public perceptions of the substance and process of these policies (Fonseca, 2025). These differences in perceptions have an impact on the emergence of speculation, uncertainty, and tacit rejection of policies, all of which illustrate serious challenges in the legitimacy aspect of policy. In the realm of public policy, legitimacy is not solely measured by the aspect of legality or administrative formality, but by the extent to which the public accepts, understands, and supports policies as something normatively and rationally legitimate (Ali & Syamsu, 2012). Without strong legitimacy, policies tend to risk failing to be implemented effectively or instead generating passive resistance that hinders key goals (Melkevick, 2023; Fahmi, 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in the quantitative approach to measure the level of Academic Acceptability to understand the response of academics to controversial policies (Creswell, 2009), as well as in the context of post-conflict countries whose governance systems are still in the consolidation stage, such as Timor-Leste (Sousa Saldanha et al., 2024; Ximenes, 2022). Another novelty is that the data analysis method in this study combines two types of inferential statistical tests, namely PLS-SEM as the main statistical analysis and the Non-Parametric Statistical Test as a supporting analysis. This combination of inferential statistical test analyses is rarely used in research contexts like this. In addition, there have been no similar studies that focus specifically on higher education issues, especially the closure of doctoral programs and relate them to the dynamics of academic perception, academic participation, and academic acceptability as a reflection of the legitimacy of government policies in the higher education sector (Levy, 2024; Melkevick, 2023; Austin & Jones, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Public Perception

According to (Glynn et al., 2004), "Public perception is not merely an individual cognitive process, but a social product shaped by collective discourse, cultural norms, and mediated representations." This means that public perception is not only the result of individual cognitive processes, but is also a social product formed through mediated cultural and informational interactions. There is another opinion saying; Public perception is a subjective assessment formed by the public of an issue, policy, or government action based on

their information, experience, and social and cultural beliefs (Kotler, P. & Keller, 2016). According to (Robins & Judge, 2013), perception is the process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment. In the context of public policy, public perception reflects how the public assesses the logic, benefits, and fairness of policies taken by the government (Dunn, 2018).

One of the important theoretical approaches in discussing public perception is the Agenda Setting Theory, which states that the mass media have the ability to shape public perception by highlighting certain issues and ignoring others. According to (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), stating that what is considered important by the media will also shape what is considered important by the public. Therefore, public perception can be greatly influenced by how a policy is communicated through the media and how the media frames the information (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of higher education policies, such as the suspension of new cycles of 14 university majors and the closure of doctoral programs in Timor Leste, the way such information is packaged and disseminated will determine the public reaction, whether it is supportive, rejective, or apathetic. Included in it, public perception can include how the public assesses the quality of education, accessibility, and relevance of the curriculum offered by higher education institutions.

Public perception is also greatly influenced by the status and socio-economic position of the community as stakeholders. According to the theory of public communication from (Habermas, 1984: p 60), each person processes information through their lifeworld, that is, the space of life experience shaped by social and cultural backgrounds. For example, lecturers as academic actors will look at government policies through professional and academic lenses; students will assess it in terms of the sustainability of their studies and their future, While student parents tend to focus on the economic impact and security of their children's future. This difference in interests creates fragmentation in public perception, which ultimately affects the level of legitimacy of a policy in the eyes of the public.

2.2. Public Participation

Public participation creates a new direct relationship between the public and the decision-makers in the bureaucracy. At the most basic level, public participation is a way to ensure that those who make decisions that affect people's lives, dialogue with the public before making those decisions. From a public perspective, public participation increases its influence on decisions that affect their lives. From the perspective of government officials, public participation provides a means by which controversial issues can be resolved. Public participation is a way of channeling these differences into a true dialogue between people with different points of view. It is a way to ensure genuine interaction and a way to convince the public that all points of view are considered (Noer, 2022:19). Public participation refers to the active involvement of the community in the decision-making, implementation, and evaluation process of policies. In the higher education sector, public participation can involve community contributions in designing curriculum, determining education priorities, and providing feedback on existing policies (Levy, 2024).

Meanwhile, according to (Ramadhan, 2023) in his book entitled *Participation and Innovation in the Public Sector*, the importance of public participation and innovation in the public sector is key to achieving good governance. Ramadan emphasized that community participation is not only a trend but a necessity in modern public administration. Public participation is defined as the active involvement of the community in the decision-making, implementation, and evaluation process of public policies. Innovation in the public sector is also considered important to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. In describing the concept of smart government that integrates digital technology with public

participation, through his book entitled *Public Participation-Based Smart Government* (Personal, 2024) emphasizes that public involvement in the digital government process can increase government transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. Public participation in this context includes the use of digital media to convey aspirations, provide input, and engage in decision-making. Meanwhile (Hutagalung, 2022) said that community participation in the implementation of government policies, especially at the regional level, is very important. Public participation is considered a key factor in the success of government, with an emphasis on community involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. Hutagalung discussed community empowerment as an effort to increase the capacity and active role of residents in development.

2.3. Public Acceptability

In the context of public policy, public acceptability can be seen as an indicator of the success of policies in achieving their goals. Dunn (1994) argues that, essentially, policies that fail to gain public support are often at risk of failing at the implementation stage. Therefore, policy analysis must pay attention to various elements that affect the community's response to the policy. Dunn emphasized the importance of an interactive process in policymaking, where decisions made must take into account the diversity of perspectives and desires of different community groups. According to Dunn, the success of a policy is not only measured in terms of its effectiveness, but also in terms of the ability of the policy to be accepted by the public. Public involvement in the policy-making process is key to reducing resistance to the policies implemented. This includes not only participation in public consultation or social debate, but also in the process of forming the common values that underlie policy. In addition, Tyler (1990), said that public acceptability is related to procedural legitimacy and trust in the decision-making process. According to (Beetham, 1991) in his book entitled *The Legitimation of Power*, it is explained that public acceptability, which is a reflection of the legitimacy of a policy, is the level of public acceptance and support for a policy that is implemented. In the context of higher education, Public Acceptability can be measured through the extent to which the policy is considered fair, transparent, and beneficial to the academic community. High Public Acceptability indicates that the policy has a strong legitimate force because it is accepted and supported by various related parties.

2.4. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

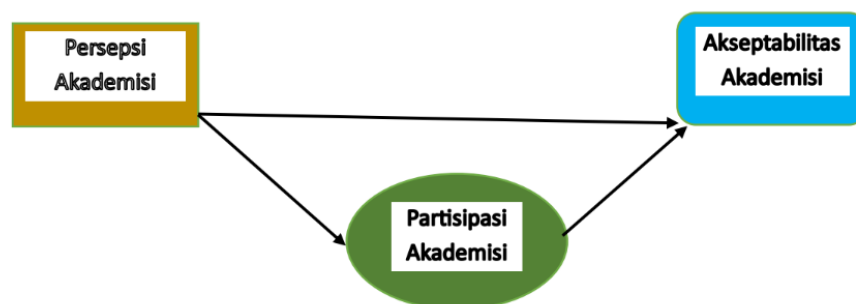


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Relational Overview Between Variables

- X → Y: Academics' Perception directly affects Academics' Acceptability.
- Z → Y: Academic Participation directly affects Academic Acceptability.
- X → Z→Y: Academics' Perception indirectly affects Academics' Acceptability through Academic Participation as a Mediating Variable (Intermediary).

Variable Explanation

X – Academic Perception (Independent Variable): UMPAZ Academics' views, assessments, and interpretations of doctoral program closure policies.

Z – Academic Participation (Mediation Variable): The level of involvement of UNPAZ Academics in the policy formulation and implementation process, including consultation, dialogue, and information disclosure.

Y – Academic acceptability (dependent variables); The degree of acceptance and support of UNPAZ Academics for the policies issued by the government includes aspects of trust, transparency, and a sense of belonging.

Hypothesis

H1: Academics' (X) perception of the policy of closing doctoral programs is at a low level (Equal Interval Model).

H2: Participation of Academics (Z) in responding to the closure of doctoral programs is at a low level (Equal Interval Model).

H3: Academic Acceptability (Y) to the policy of closing doctoral programs is at a low level (Equal Interval Model).

H4: Academic Perception is significantly related to Academic Acceptability

H5: Academic Participation is significantly related to Academic Acceptability.

H6: Academic Perception is significantly related to Academic Participation.

H7: Academic Perception and Academic Participation are simultaneously significantly related to Academic Acceptability.

3. Methods

This research is included in the type of descriptive-quantitative correlation, using a quantitative approach. The location of this study is Dili City, the capital of Timor-Leste. The reason for choosing Dili City is because Dili is the administrative center and moreover, Dili is home to most of the main population or target population of this research, namely UNPAZ Academics, where the UNPAZ Central Campus is located in the City of Dili. In this study, the main population is UNPAZ Academics which are divided into 4 categories, with the category name Academic Status, which consists of active lecturers totaling 288 people, active Postgraduate Program students (S2 and S3), totaling 220 people, Undergraduate Program Students (S1) from FKMIK (Faculty of Public Health and Medical Sciences) academic year 2025, totaling 4076 people, and Employees who have worked at UNPAZ for at least 5 years, totaling 82 people. Thus, the total population of this study is 4666 people. The sampling technique of this study uses a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. The data analysis in this study was carried out with two inferential statistical approaches (mixed inferential analysis), namely Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) as the main method and non-parametric test as the supporting method.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, the main population or target population is the Academics of the University of Peace (UNPAZ) which is divided into 3 categories (Academic Status), namely; Lecturers, Postgraduate Program Students, Students of FKMIK Undergraduate Program (Faculty of Public Health & Medical Sciences) and Employees.

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents by Age

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–27 Years	136	52.90
28–37 Years	37	14.40
38–47 Years	55	21.40
48–57 Years	27	10.50
≥58 Years	2	0.80
Total	257	100

Source: Data processed, 2025

Based on the table above, out of 257 respondents, 136 respondents or 52.90% were aged 18-27 years, 37 respondents or 14.40% were aged 28-37 years, 55 respondents or 21.40% were aged 38-47 years, 27 respondents or 10.50% were aged 48-57 years and 2 respondents or 0.80% were aged >=58 years.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	99	38.50
Female	158	61.50
Total	257	100

Based on the table above, out of 257 respondents, as many as 99 people or 38.50% were male and as many as 158 people or 61.50% were female.

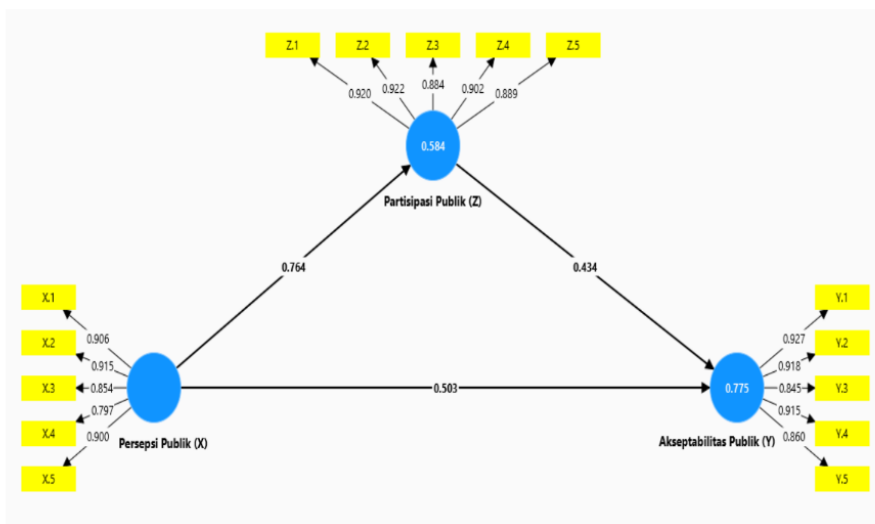


Figure 2. Model PLS

Academic Perception (X) consists of five indicators (X.1–X.5) with an outer loading value between 0.797–0.915. All indicators exceeded the threshold of 0.70, so it can be concluded that all indicators are valid in reflecting the construct of Academic Perception. Academic Acceptability (Y) consists of five indicators (Y.1–Y.5) with an outer loading value between 0.845–0.927. This value shows that each indicator has excellent power in measuring the Academic Acceptability variable. Academic participation (Z) consists of five indicators

(Z.1–Z.5) with an outer loading value between 0.884–0.922. All indicators are well above 0.70, thus indicating strong convergent validity. Overall, all indicators in this study have an outer loading value greater than 0.70, which means that all question items used in the research instrument are declared valid. Thus, no indicators are eliminated, and the constructs of Academic Perception, Academic Participation, and Academic Acceptability are proven to be well measured by the indicators.

Table 2. Direct Impact Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample red (M)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Academic Participation (Z)-> Academic Acceptability (Y)	0.434	0.431	7.939	0.000
Academic Perception(X) -> Academic Acceptability (Y)	0.503	0.505	9.469	0.000
Academic Perception (X) -> Academic Participation (Z)	0.764	0.766	27.559	0.000

Source: Data processed

The results of the Path Coefficient analysis in Table 4.7 show that all the paths of influence between variables ($X \rightarrow Y$, $X \rightarrow Z$, and $Z \rightarrow Y$) are statistically significant with the direction of the positive relationship. Academic Perception has proven to be the dominant variable, as it not only has a direct effect on Academic Acceptability but also plays an important role in increasing Academic Participation. Furthermore, Academic Participation has also been proven to make a significant contribution to Academic Acceptability. Thus, it can be concluded that the Acceptability of Academics to the government's decision to suspend doctoral study programs is largely determined by the quality of Academics' Perceptions and the involvement of Academics' Participation. These findings are in line with the theory of public policy legitimacy, which states that public acceptance of a policy is strongly influenced by their perception and involvement in the policy process (Easton, 1965; Suchman, 1995).

4.2. Discussion

Data shows that the National Heroes University (UNPAZ) has shown stable and significant growth since its establishment in 2004. Institutional development is marked by the increase in Faculties, from 6 Faculties at the beginning of its establishment to 7 Faculties in 2025, with the addition of the Faculty of Forestry. UNPAZ's contribution to human resource development can be seen from its impressive graduation achievements, where for 17 years (2007-2024), UNPAZ has graduated a total of 17,058 Bachelors (S1). This figure reflects an average annual graduation rate of more than 1,000 Bachelors, demonstrating the institution's large capacity to produce graduates. In addition, UNPAZ actively builds its network through strategic cooperation, not only with a large number of leading universities in Indonesia (including UGM, UI, UNAIR, and UB) but also with international higher education institutions in various countries such as the Philippines, Japan, and Australia. This network of partnerships affirms UNPAZ's commitment to improving academic quality and its global relevance.

Descriptive statistical analysis of 257 respondents, whose demographic characteristics are mostly dominated by young age groups (18-27 years with 52.90%) and female (61.50%), revealed serious challenges in policy acceptance. The main results of the study, which were

interpreted using the Equal Interval Model (EIM), showed a tendency for very low scores across the variables studied, which are the determinants of policy acceptance. Consistently, the average total scores for Academic Perception (10.32), Academic Participation (11.59), and Academic Acceptability (9.77) all fall in the Low category. These critical findings imply that in general, academics and stakeholders have a less positive view of the policy, feeling that their involvement in the recruitment process is minimal, which ultimately triggers low acceptance of the policy of closing doctoral programs in Timor Leste. Low Acceptability (9.77) which is a dependent variable, is most likely a direct consequence of low Perception and Participation. Therefore, this data provides strong empirical evidence of the urgent need to review communication strategies and public consultation processes in order to improve the legitimacy and support for higher education policies.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of quantitative research using 3 types of analysis methods; The Descriptive method of the Equal Interval Model, and the two Inferential methods: PLS-SEM and Non-Parametric Statistical Test, can be drawn the following conclusions:

- a) The level of academic perception of the government's policy of suspending doctoral study programs is in the low category.
- b) The level of participation of academics in the process of suspending doctoral study programs is in the low category.
- c) The level of acceptability of academics to the government's policy of suspending doctoral study programs is in the low category
- d) Perception of Academics (X) has a positive and significant effect on the Acceptability of Academics (Y) towards the policy of suspending doctoral study programs in Timor Leste.
- e) Academic Participation (Z) positively and significantly affects Academic Acceptability (Y), demonstrating the importance of active public involvement in policy processes.
- f) Academics' Perception (X) also has a very strong influence on Academician Participation (Z).
- g) Academic participation plays a significant mediator in the relationship between Academician Perception and Academic Acceptability, reinforcing the indirect influence of independent variables on dependents.
- h) There are significant differences in government policies based on academic status. Lecturers and Students of the Postgraduate Program have a negative attitude.
- i) There is no significant difference in the government's policy of suspending doctoral study programs based on gender status.
- j) There are significant differences in government policies based on education level. The higher the academic education, the lower the acceptance rate of government policies.

5.1. Suggestion

Based on the above conclusions, it is recommended:

- a) The Government of Timor Leste needs to optimize the public consultation and dialogue mechanism in the formulation and implementation of higher education policies, in order to increase positive perception and public participation in policies.
- b) Academics and other stakeholders should be encouraged to actively participate and provide constructive input so that the resulting policies are more inclusive and responsive to real needs.
- c) Public communication should focus on information transparency and procedural fairness to strengthen policy legitimacy and reduce public resistance.

- d) Researchers can then utilize dual testing methods (PLS-SEM and non-parametric) to obtain a more comprehensive analysis, especially in the context of complex social variables in developing or post-conflict countries.
- e) Periodic evaluation of public perception and participation needs to be carried out as input for sustainable policy improvement.

Thus, this research makes an important contribution both in theory and practice in the development of public policy governance in the higher education sector in Timor Leste and countries with similar contexts.

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