Understanding Why Academics and Lower-Level Managers Connect Research and Education

The Underpinning Behavioural, Normative and Control Beliefs

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Title: Understanding Why Academics and Lower-Level Managers Connect Research and Education: The Underpinning Behavioural, Normative and Control Beliefs

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Structured Abstract:
After the integration of research activities, universities of applied sciences (UASs) have formulated organisational strategies to foster connections between research and education (Daas et al., 2023). Scholars stated that the behaviour of employees within UASs influences 'the direction and tempo in which the proposed aims are reached or resisted in the wider organisation' (Griffioen & De Jong, 2017, p. 454). Thus, employees within UASs, such as academics and lower-level managers, play a key role in establishing research-education connections (Jenkins & Healey, 2005; Van der Rijst, 2009). A recent study has shown that academics and lower-level managers connect research and education through three types of behaviours: by involving aspects of research in education, by involving aspects of education in research, and by involving aspects of research and education equally, with the first type mentioned most often (Daas & Griffioen, in review). Similar patterns are observed in previous studies highlighting how education benefits from research rather than vice versa (Taylor, 2007). However, the beliefs underpinning this behavioural focus still remain unclear.

Scholars have reported factors that could influence employees in connecting research and education, such as career stages, personal abilities and the availability of resources influencing how academics combine research and teaching tasks (Coate, Barnett & Williams, 2001; Shin, 2011), and research productivity and teaching beliefs influencing how academics integrate research in teaching (Hu et al., 2015; Magi & Beerkens, 2016). Despite the important value of these insights, these studies all focus on one (set of) behaviour(s) in connecting research and education instead of considering factors influencing behaviours in connecting research and education holistically. Moreover, most of these studies consider academics instead of managers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs underpinning the behaviour of academics and lower-level managers in UASs in connecting research and education.

To study the underpinning beliefs we applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical lens. According to the TPB, a person's behavioural intentions are shaped through three determinants (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioural beliefs (1) refer to a person's conceptions about the expected positive/negative outcomes of practicing the behaviour. Normative beliefs (2) consist of a person's conceptions about whether others approve/disapprove of practicing the behaviour. Control beliefs (3) are a person's conceptions about the presumed factors that could enable/hinder in practicing the behaviour. The research question is: Which behavioural, normative and control beliefs underpin the behaviour of academics and lower-level managers in connecting research and education?

Method

To answer the research question, 62 semi-structured interviews were conducted within three Dutch UASs. Among academics, we selected a mixture of lecturers (only education tasks) and researcher-lecturers (research and education tasks combined; and only research tasks). Among lower-level managers, we selected research managers (i.e. applied professors) and education managers (i.e. programme and team managers). Respondents were selected from a variety of disciplinary fields.

The interviews considered both respondents' behaviour (reported in our earlier study Daas & Griffioen, in review), as well as how their behaviour was shaped. The interview topics for the beliefs were designed in line with the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) and included questions about the behavioural, normative and control beliefs of the respondents in regard with their behaviour.

Regarding analysing the data, first, the data was organised in quotes that included beliefs in regard with a certain behaviour. Second, two researchers open coded the selected quotes, combined the open codes if found similar (axial coding) and grouped them into code groups (selective coding) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Fourth, these code groups were typified as either behavioural, normative or control beliefs (TPB, Ajzen, 1991). In each phase, differences were discussed until agreement was reached. The final code scheme was applied to all data by two researchers in Atlas.ti 9, after which a third researcher conducted a cross-check of 10% of the interviews, resulting in high reliability.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the relative amount of co-relations between the types of beliefs and the behavioural approaches. First, behaviour directed to 'involving research in education' is mostly underpinned by positive behavioural beliefs, which mostly concern positive esteemed effects for students, the educational programme, and lecturers. Additionally, many respondents mentioned approving normative beliefs and enabling/hindering control beliefs underpinning this behaviour. Second, behaviour concerning 'involving education In research' is mostly underpinned by both enabling and hindering control beliefs. For instance, respondents mentioned the educational design and lack of time/finances hinder this behaviour, while behaviour of others, availability of time/finances and interaction/relationship with others enable this behaviour. Third, behaviour regarding 'involving research and education equally' is evenly underpinned by positive behavioural, normative and control beliefs and hindering control beliefs. For example, many respondents mentioned positive behavioural beliefs about esteemed effects for students, the educational programme and the connection between research and education.

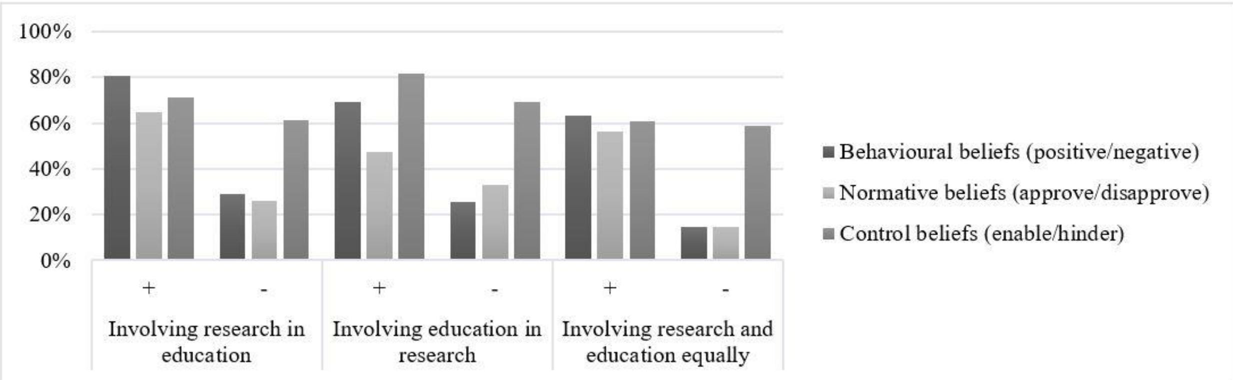

Figure 1: Relative amount of code-relations between beliefs and behavioural approaches

In conclusion, the findings show that each of the three behavioural approaches is shaped by behavioural, normative and control beliefs; however, overall control beliefs are most prominently mentioned by the respondents. This finding corresponds with previous research which mostly reports how control beliefs influence connecting research and education (e.g. Shin, 2011). When comparing the beliefs underpinning the three behavioural approaches, it is shown how control beliefs are most prominently mentioned regarding behaviour directed to 'involving education in research'. This might explain Daas and Griffioen's (in review) finding that respondents mostly focussed on behaviour directed to 'involving research in education' rather than vice versa. Furthermore, the current research also shows how behavioural beliefs and normative beliefs also greatly underpin the behaviour of academics and lower-level managers in connecting research and education, which is an addition to our current understanding of the factors influencing such behaviour.

Research limitations, implications:

The exploratory nature of this study coupled with the application of the TPB led to the identification of additional factors influencing higher education employees' behaviour compared to prior research. Future studies may focus on empirically testing the findings of the current exploratory study.

Practical/social implications:

Insights into the factors that influence behaviour in connecting research and education can inform policy makers and managers in UASs in making strategic and HRM-decisions to enhance research-education connections in higher education practice.

Originality/value of paper:

This paper considers factors influencing behaviour in connecting research and education in general, and therefore contributes to closing the knowledge gap on how factors influence such behaviour holistically rather than in isolation as was done in previous research. Furthermore, this paper is the first to apply the TPB as a theoretical lense to look at behaviour in connecting research and education.

Keywords: [1-4 keywords]

Higher education; research-teaching nexus, employee behaviour, theory of planned behaviour

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