

Connecting research and education in Universities of Applied Sciences

Behavioural intentions of lecturer-/researchers, education managers and research managers

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Publication date

2023

License

Unspecified

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Daas, S. R., & Griffioen, D. M. E. (2023). *Connecting research and education in Universities of Applied Sciences: Behavioural intentions of lecturer-/researchers, education managers and research managers*.

Paper presented at ECER 2023, Glasgow, United Kingdom.



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Title: Connecting research and education in Universities of Applied Sciences: Behavioural intentions of lecturer-/researchers, education managers and research managers

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Keywords: higher education, employee behaviour, research-education connections, strategy implementation

Network: Research in Higher Education (thematic fields: Academic work and professional development/policy, management and governance in higher education)

Alternative network: Policy Studies and Politics of Education

Introduction

Around the end of the 1990's, Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) in Europe have seen a shift when the Bologna and Lisbon agreements resulted in different expectations from UASs (De Boer, 2017). To stimulate innovations in professional practice and to create a so-called value-adding 'knowledge economy', the European society was said to need more highly educated professionals to contribute to innovations (Griffioen, Ashwin and Scholkmann, 2021), and to deal with a growing and diverse body of complex knowledge (Brew, 2006). This line of reasoning resulted in the integration of research activities into UASs, which transformed these organisations from teaching-only institutions into institutions with two central processes: education and research.

In order to educate highly skilled professionals that are fit for today's knowledge economy, research activities are being connected with the UASs' educational processes. Research and education can be connected in a variety of ways, and on different levels throughout higher education organisations: on the level of the student, the employee, the curriculum, the department and at the organisational level (Jenkins and Healey, 2005; Trowler and Wareham, 2008). Previous work shows that UASs at the organisational level have formulated a variety of strategic aims they foresee to achieve through such research-education connections (Daas, Day and Griffioen, in review). However, it is presumed that research and education processes are not easily combined (e.g. Fox, 1992). For example, research and education processes have shown to bring along distinctive structures and systems (Brew, 2006), work patterns (Robertson and Bond, 2005) and require different competencies from employees to practice both activities at a high professional level (Griffioen, 2018). Enacting strategies to connect research and education in practice, and achieving strategic aims through these connections, might therefore not be an easy and straightforward endeavour.

The enactment of organisational strategies is the result of the collective action of an organisation's employees (Mintzberg, 1990). In the case of research-education connections, employees need to 'reinvent' their own practices through adjusted behaviour. Collectively, their behaviour is at the steering wheel of strategy enactment. Considering the different levels throughout higher education organisations at which strategies to connect research and education

can be executed, it is expected that a wide range of actors contributes to enacting these strategies, such as lecturers at the level of the curriculum (Van der Rijst, 2009), and managers at the level of the department and organisation (Jenkins and Healey, 2005). While previous studies focused on how research and education are connected at separate levels of higher education organisations, such as the individual level (Magi and Beerkens, 2016) and the department level (Durning and Jenkins, 2005), little is known about how employees within UASs collectively contribute to connecting research and education from an organisational perspective. In this study we focus on the behavioural intentions to connect research and education of actors that are directly involved in the processes of research and education, and the related first management level. The central question is: “What are the behavioural intentions of lecturers, researchers, research-managers and education-managers in connecting research and education and how are these intentions shaped?”

Method

To answer the research question, $N=61$ semi-structured interviews were conducted in three Dutch UASs with lecturers, researchers (note: lecturer/researchers with only teaching OR research tasks, as well as lecturer-researchers with both tasks), research-managers (i.e. applied professors that managed a research-group of $4 <$ lecturer-/researchers) and education-managers (i.e. team leaders or educational programme leaders that managed an educational team of $10 <$ lecturer-/researchers). Additionally, the respondents represented a variety of disciplinary fields.

The interviews considered the respondents’ behavioural intentions, as well as how these intentions were shaped. Behavioural intentions are defined as ‘anything a person does [has done, or intends to do] in response to internal or external events’ (Rubinstein, 2018, p.36). The interview topics about how the behavioural intentions were shaped, were designed in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (ToPB; Ajzen, 1991). The ToPB states that a person’s behavioural intentions are mainly shaped through three determinants: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioural beliefs refer to a person’s conceptions about positive/negative outcomes of practising the behaviour. Normative beliefs consist of a person’s conceptions about whether others approve/disapprove of practicing the behaviour. Control beliefs are the experienced factors that could facilitate or impede a person in practicing the behaviour.

Data reduction was done through grounded coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of (1) the behavioural intentions, and of (2) the beliefs in regard with the behavioural intentions. Two researchers developed a coding scheme in several rounds of coding in Atlas.ti 9. First, the data was organised in quotes that included behaviour in connecting research and education. Second, these quotes were open coded. Third, the open codes were combined using axial coding. Fourth, the axial

codes were grouped into code groups using selective coding. Then a similar strategy was applied for the beliefs in regard with the behavioural intentions. The combined code scheme was applied to all data by one researcher, after which a second researcher conducted a cross-check of 10 percent of the coded quotes.

In January 2023, we have analysed the behavioural intentions (1) by qualitatively describing the code groups hereof, but the code groups for the beliefs in regard with the behavioural intentions (2) still need to be analysed. Therefore we now only draw conclusions about part 1.

Conclusions

The preliminary results show that the behavioural intentions in regard with connecting research and education discussed by the respondents can be divided over three categories that emphasise the direction of the behaviour: (1) involvement of education in research, (2) involvement of research in education, and (3) research and education coming together. All three categories contain both direct behaviour, as well as behaviour that is focussed on creating supportive conditions for the behaviour of others (i.e. supportive behaviour). Overall, the respondents mostly discuss behavioural intentions in regard with students/lecturers who participate in research (and the intention to support this behaviour) (category 1), followed by lecturer-/researchers integrating research results in curricula, research-managers/lecturer-researchers sharing research results with lecturers, researchers/research-managers participating in education, and students being taught a research-like attitude/abilities (category 2). It stands out that more behavioural intentions are focused on integrating *something* from research into education (e.g. research-results/competencies, participation from research-actors), and less on integrating *something* from education into research (only participation from education-actors).

The focus on how education might profit from research is also seen in previous studies (Brew, 2006; Visser-Wijnveen, 2013) and raises questions about the value of research-education connections for both research and education processes. Possibly, actors are less prepared to contribute to research-education connections on the long term if they experience little added value for their own activities. This is problematic as connections between research and education require actors from both processes to work towards connections between research and education. Therefore, it is important to look more detailed into how the behavioural intentions of actors to contribute to connections between research and education are shaped. During the conference, the additional insights into how the behavioural, normative and control beliefs of actors shape their behavioural intentions will be shared, as well the scientific and practical implications of these insights.

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