

Using The Theory Of Planned Behavior To Understand In-Service Kindergarten Teachers' Behavior To Enroll In A Graduate Level Academic Program

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate and predict the behavioral intention of in-service Taiwanese kindergarten teachers regarding whether they would join a graduate level academic program. The research framework was based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in order to identify the most influential component that affected their intention to join a graduate level academic program. The study results demonstrate that the three components of the theory of planned behavior accurately predicted the factors affecting the kindergarten teachers concerning this intention. The most powerful components to affect the teachers were attitude and perceived behavioral control. Both attitude and perceived behavioral control were correlated and had a significant relationship to intention.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the present globalization of the environment, Taiwanese kindergarten teachers who graduated from four-year-colleges or two-year-colleges find that they (and their parents) are no longer satisfied with the quality of their education. Therefore, kindergarten teachers often begin to search for an in-service graduate level academic program or a regular graduate school in order to pursue more instruction in the field of education. This tells us that the transition from college to the workplace has, as its main focus, the concern of career development (Boulmetis, 1997). The kindergarten teachers realize that taking further courses can enable them to better fulfill their career goals and enhance their teaching abilities. After teaching a few years, some kindergarten instructors begin to realize that if they want to get promoted, even though they have enough teaching experience, they must also have to earn a master's degree related to the field of education or at least take some relevant courses from a graduate school. According to Apps (1988), the level of Taiwanese kindergarten teachers' education is the most important factor that affects their career and human resource development.

In addition, if kindergarten teachers believe that taking in-service graduate level classes will develop their education, thus being very meaningful for their future, then these teachers would expect that what they learn can develop their future careers (Hsieh, 2002). On the contrary, if kindergarten teachers do not believe that joining an in-service graduate level academic program can help them in their future careers, then their behavioral intention to enroll in a graduate in-service program would not be strong. Hsieh (2002) noted that even if the teachers join an in-service graduate program and they think a graduate level academic program will not give them much help, then their attitude will be negative. This means that they do not expect their in-service graduate level courses to contribute to their professional advancement. Many researchers believe that every kindergarten teacher's intention and motivation to develop professional educational knowledge is self-directed. Whether the behavioral in-service graduate level learning intention is strong or weak depends upon the kindergarten teacher's attitudes and beliefs in their future career development (Reilly, Lewis, & Tanner, 1983).

PERSPECTIVE/RATIONALE

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) was created by the researcher I. Ajzen in 1985. This theory is an extension of Ajzen and Fishbein’s theory of reasoned action (1975). According to Ajzen (1991), over the past twenty years a number of researchers have used the TPB to predict and explain an individual’s behavioral intentions and behaviors. According to Cuerrier, Deshaies, Mongeau, Luc, and Vallerand (1992), among many models and theories, the theory of planned behavior is a well-known theory. This theory explains and predicts human behavior and behavioral intention. Action is determined by one’s behavioral intentions. Therefore, an individual’s behavior can be controlled by the individual’s consciousness. Behavior and behavioral intentions are influenced by attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. In a real situation involving behavior, the human’s decision is not controlled solely by individual consciousness; it is influenced by unmotivated factors, such as information, time, and money. In addition to attitude toward the behavior and the subjective norm in the theory of planned behavior, perceived behavioral control can influence intention as well. Perceived behavioral control influences the individual’s decision through behavioral intention.

This study used the theory of planned behavior to explore the behavioral intention of Taiwanese in-service kindergarten teachers’ intentions to join a graduate level academic program to enhance or facilitate their career development and personal goals. This research study is designed to investigate the attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of these kindergarten teachers to better understand why they would return to college to study in an in-service graduate level academic program and what factors influenced their decisions.

MODEL OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

Figure1. Equation of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977)

$$B \sim BI = w1 AB + w2 SN + w3 PBC$$

Behavioral intention is the best method to predict the individual’s behavior. Also, behavioral intention and behavior are highly correlated. Behavioral intention includes three related factors: (1) Attitude toward the behavior, (2) Subjective norms, and (3) Perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

(1) Attitude Toward The Behavior (AB)

Attitudinal Equation

Figure 2: Ajzen, 2001, p. 9

$$AB = \sum bi ei$$

Attitude toward the behavior (AB) means the individual component that indicates an individual’s positive or negative feelings towards the behavior. The function of AB is the behavioral beliefs of these expected outcomes and the evaluations of these expected outcomes. The attitude belief score is $AB = \sum bi ei$. This can be measured by the sum of the products of the behavior outcome result “belief, bi” and to these results desirability’s “evaluation, ei”.

(2) Subjective Norms (SN)

Subjective Norms Equation

Figure 3: Ajzen, 2001, p. 9.

$$SN = \sum ni mi$$

Subjective norms are the social pressures on an individual’s perception to perform or not perform a behavior. The function of normative beliefs is about the performance of the indirect behavior and the indirect motivation to comply with these normative beliefs. The subjective norms score, $SN = \sum ni mi$, was derived by summing the products of the normative beliefs (ni) which illustrates that the individual perceives the importance that other individuals or groups have. This indicates an individual may succumb to the pressure to do that behavior. Motivation to comply (mi) means that the individual’s behavior to other individuals or groups is important to him or her.

(3) Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)

Perceived Behavioral Control Equation

Figure 4: Ajzen, 2001, p. 9.

$$PBC = \sum ci pi$$

The perceived behavioral control is the product constructed from control beliefs, Ci , and belief power, Pi . Control beliefs mean the individual adopts the idea that he/she can control a particular behavior. Information, opportunities or barriers to the behavioral level influence belief power.

DATA SOURCES/METHODS

Data were analyzed and run through these tests using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The research methods used in this study are organized according to the theoretical model: sample and data collection, research instrument, questionnaire translation, elicitation study, developing the questionnaire, pilot study, reliability, the final questionnaire, and statistical treatment of the data. The six randomly selected universities’ in-service graduate level academic programs were in the north, central and southern regions of Taiwan. 280 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed by descriptive statistics, t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson product correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The 280 valid questionnaires were also considered to be significant in terms of internal reliability.

In this study, the research instrument was divided into two parts. The first part was the elicitation study and the second part was the questionnaire. The researcher devised five questions for the elicitation study. The elicitation questions were designed to inquire about the participants’ perceived advantages and disadvantages in their behavioral intentions to join an in-service graduate level academic program. The pilot population ($n = 30$) was kindergarten teachers who were not presently joining an in-service graduate level program. The pilot population is similar to the sample population in that these kindergarten teachers had come to apply to study in-service graduate level academic programs.

The investigator used the Cronbach alpha test to estimate reliability and internal consistency for the questionnaire. Pearson's r correlation coefficients were computed between pairs of the measured variables. To determine each indirect component's relationship and weight regarding behavioral intention in this research, multiple regression was used to analyze independently the correlation coefficients of attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intention. Then, the behavioral intention was determined by measuring the beta weights of the indirect components against each other. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the effect of the three predictive components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intention. This test produced the total of squares, mean square, degrees of freedom, F score, and p-value ($p < .05$).

CONCLUSIONS/FINDINGS

The independent variables were attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Behavioral intention was the dependent variable. The Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability test was conducted to evaluate each variable from the questionnaire of the pilot study.

The Pearson correlation coefficient of each component and the behavioral intention were all correlated to behavioral intention and also reached the significance level ($p < .05$), except the preconceived behavioral control component which did not reach the level of significance. The results show that the attitude toward the behavior is correlated to the behavioral intention ($r = .482$) and the null hypothesis was rejected because the significance probability was .000. The subjective norm is correlated to the behavioral intention ($r = .643$) and the null hypothesis was rejected because the significance probability was .000. The perceived behavioral control is correlated to the behavioral intention ($r = .157$) but the significance level was .239, which means that it did not reach the level of significance $p < .05$. The relationships between the variables were found to be significant and correlated to each other.

The strongest variable to predict the behavioral intention in this research study was subjective norm as compared to attitude toward the behavior and perceived behavioral control. Therefore, the subjective norm still influenced the kindergarten teachers' intentions to join an in-service graduate level academic program. The second strongest variable to predict the behavioral intention in this research study was attitude toward the behavior which influenced the behavioral intention of kindergarten teachers to join in-service graduate level academic program. As could be expected, this finding means that those kindergarten teachers who had the most positive intention of normative belief and attitude belief were the ones who exhibited the strongest intentions to enroll in an in-service graduate level program. This is because they understood their participation in further education would increase such factors as 1) being a controller in their lives, (2) gaining new knowledge and teaching information, (3) changing the style of their ways of thinking and teaching, (4) encouraging their future desire to engage in further study, (5) developing their self-realization and achievements, (6) career planning, and (7) understanding their intrinsic motivation as kindergarten teachers.

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