

Employability and students' part-time work in the UK: does self-efficacy and career aspiration matter?

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ABSTRACT

Amidst a growing focus on graduate employability, this study examines the relationship between students' part-time work, career aspirations and self-efficacy, in a survey of 357 UK students from two post-92 universities. The results suggest a positive and significant relationship between part-time work and career aspiration. Students who work part-time, and value this opportunity, are likely to have a high career aspiration and strive to enhance their employability agenda. Self-efficacy (students' belief in their ability to succeed) is significantly associated with career aspiration. No significant gender differences were found in our sample for all study variables. Finally, students' level of study and malleable self-theories (the belief that people are changeable and with effort can achieve more) were found to be the strongest predictors of part-time work, while self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of career aspiration. These findings confirm the importance of individual self-efficacy in the value attached to part-time working among students in higher education (HE). Nonetheless, those students who do not work part-time whilst studying, do so mainly because they do not want to detract from their study. The concluding part of the paper discusses relevant application and policy implications of these findings.

Keywords: employability, part-time work, career aspiration, self-efficacy

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of a global recession, dramatic increases in tuition fees for higher education (HE) in England, the growing focus on graduate employability, and the significant numbers of undergraduate students who are working part-time whilst studying full-time, this article examines the perception of students regarding their part-time working, future career aspirations and self-efficacy.

Galvanising Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to the employability agenda

Since the Dearing Report into Higher Education (1997) emphasised the importance of education for employability, the issue of graduate employability has ranked high on the UK Government's agenda (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007). As a consequence, HEIs have placed greater emphasis on the employability of their graduates (Jackson, 1999; Knight & Yorke, 2002, 2003) with the result that many HEIs now embed employability frameworks within their curriculum (Harvey, Locke & Morey, 2002; Smith *et al*, 2007).

Yet employability is more than merely the acquisition of a job; it is concerned with equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and abilities to enable them to be capable of gaining and maintaining employment (Harvey, 2001; Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). This is why the actions of HEIs designed to enhance graduate employability should be of paramount importance to students. Yet, while Hinchliffe & Jolly (2011) provide evidence supporting a theoretically-based critique of skills development, equating skills with employability, Tymon (2011) notes the frequent lack of alignment between the perceptions of students, employers and HEIs regarding employability.

There are several works that examine the knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by employers (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010; Wilton, 2008, 2011). Nonetheless, the ability of a graduate to get an appropriate job (Yorke & Knight, 2007) is felt to be dependent on a diverse range of factors, such as the state of the economy and patterns of discrimination in the labour market (Yorke, 2004), which makes the task of delivering an effective employability strategy within undergraduate programmes somewhat problematic.

Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1993). This is important because students' belief in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and master academic activities determines their aspirations, level of motivation and levels of academic accomplishment (Bandura, 1993). Students with strong self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). This study is focussed on students in full-time HE and provides some insight into the connections that exist when students work part-time, what career aspirations they have, and who they are – their personality.

Increasing part-time working among students

While the inter-relationships between undergraduate studies, part-time working, self-efficacy and career orientations have not previously been examined in a single work, numerous studies exist connecting these variables. For example, as a result of a study of Dutch undergraduates, Vermeulen & Schmidt (2008) found a strong relationship between individual characteristics, the learning environment and the workplace. This is subsequently confirmed by O'Connor & Cordova (2010) in their exploratory study into the work and study experiences of adult learners. Part-time working can be useful in facilitating reflection regarding potential future career direction. Here, Billett & Ovens (2007) note that part-time working facilitates individuals' reflection on whether they are suited to a

particular type of work, and thereby helps to inform potential career pathways. Nonetheless, Ozbilgin *et al* (2005) in their study of MBA students, found the predominance of individuals' belief in their own skills and abilities was more influential than external influences in driving their careers. However, Buchanan, *et al* (2007) found that business degree students tend to be more oriented to career development opportunities than the desire to acquire knowledge derived from their degree studies. Yet, McIlveen *et al* (2011) recognised that work-related learning not only helps individuals learn about themselves, but also provides insights into the connections between work and their studies, and therefore aligns well with career planning (McMahon *et al*, 2003). In particular, this activity is felt to support an individual's understanding of their personal career identity (McIlveen *et al*, 2011) and helping to increase self-confidence and develop skills that are transferable into the work environment (Curtis and Shani, 2002).

While HEIs grapple with the employability agenda, significant numbers of students are undertaking part-time work, whilst studying full-time for a degree (NUS/ HSBC Students Research Experience Report, 2010; UCAS, 2011). Here, numerous studies have examined students' part-time work activities, particularly their motives (Ford, Bosworth & Wilson, 1995; Richardson, Evans & Gbadamosi, 2009), the challenges of balancing work and study (Hall, 2010; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006) and its impact upon academic performance (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Many studies (such as Ford *et al*, 1995; Richardson *et al*, 2009) have investigated why students work part-time. While Billet & Ovens (2007) found that part-time working facilitates individual reflection upon future career direction, previous studies have not fully examined the extent to which part-time jobs actually drive career aspirations. This study will contribute to filling this gap. Similarly, we have addressed a gap in the literature by asking students who do not work part-time, why they do not.

Career aspiration

The decisions that direct an individual's career can be influenced by a number of personal factors and family pressures. In addition, personality traits (Gunkel *et al*, 2010) and gender differences (Al Miskry, Bakar & Mohamed, 2009) appear to affect career aspirations, especially occupational choice. However, the values of future financial returns derived from a particular career path are felt to be a key factor (Borg, 1994; Itkin, 2008). It is the lure of perceived career opportunities and enhanced future earnings that are seen to be important for individuals who pursue business-related degree programmes (Piotrowski & Cox, 2004). Nonetheless, the broad range of jobs encompassed within the scope of 'business' does create some confusion among individuals in determining a precise career route (Buchanan, Kim & Basham, 2007; Itkin, 2008). What seems to provide individuals with the information on which to base an informed decision lies not with career guidance and support, but through personal work experience (Borg, 1994). It seems, therefore, that with the increased participation in part-time working, students either are seeking to reinforce HEIs' employability activities, or looking to create their own employability agenda. One may argue that working as a waiter/waitress in a restaurant (a common role that many students undertake on a part-time basis) does not enhance the employability agenda or career aspiration of an undergraduate Business Management student, but may indeed be relevant for a Hospitality Management student. Yet, in terms of networking opportunities, such a role may be relevant to any undergraduate student. This would, however, depend upon an individual's belief that their decision to work part-time actually contributed to their reflection on potential career directions. We therefore propose hypothesis 1 as outlined below:

Hypotheses 1: Students' part-time work will be positively related to their career aspiration

The role of self-efficacy and self-theories

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. Bandura (1994) described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. Yorke &

Knight (2007) saw employability in terms of four broad measures, one of which was efficacy. It is this concept of self-efficacy – “the belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1995, p.2) that potentially drives the decision for individuals to work part-time whilst studying towards a degree on a full-time basis. Moreover, it reinforces the question of whether employability is a matter of individual attributes and responsibility as opposed to being labour-market driven (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Some authors (such as Hesketh, 2003) however, argue that personal characteristics are irrelevant in employability.

Self-theories are the belief systems that learners have regarding the extent to which attributes, like intelligence, are changeable (Dweck, 1999). Yoke & Knight (2004, 2007) argued that a minority perception that intelligence is essentially fixed and not malleable has implications for students’ learning and teaching in HE. Self-theories are important mediators of students’ development and achievement (Yoke & Knight, 2004). How we explain what we experience (attributional patterns), whether we think we are generally able to affect our experiences (locus of control) and whether we therefore strive, comply or resist (motivational concomitants) is what constitutes self-theories (Knight & Yorke, 2003). The result of all of these factors in combination influences us as individuals, and Knight & Yorke (2003) argue that we tend to learn the options available, make choices and change our preferences. Yorke & Knight (2004) used the term “fixed” and “malleable” to describe the two extremes. The malleable position is that with effort one can achieve more, while the fixed position suggests that people have little chance of making a difference. Consequently students who are malleable can make good claims to employability and strive on in the face of challenges and difficulties. Much of previous discussions of self-theories have been focussed on pedagogy. Understanding self-theories is however equally relevant to understanding the personality of individuals as hinted at by Yoke & Knight (2004), hence we examine the extent to which self-theories is associated with part-time working.

Although, self-efficacy and self-theories may contribute to the explanation of whether students are engaged in part-time work or not, we did not find any studies that specifically looked at the relationship between the roles of self-efficacy and/or self-theories and part-time working. Consequently, the relationship between both self-efficacy and part-time working; as well as self-theories and part-time working remains relatively unexplored. In particular, it is the examination of the roles of self-efficacy and self-theories in the complex scenario of part-time work coupled with full-time study, that adds-value to the existing academic work in this area. We therefore propose three further hypotheses as outlined below:

Hypotheses 2: Students’ high levels of self-efficacy will be positively related to their part-time work and career aspiration

Hypotheses 3: Students’ fixed self-theories will be negatively related to their part-time work and career aspiration

Hypotheses 4: Students’ malleable self-theories will be positively related to their part-time work and career aspiration

The role of gender

Long-standing structural inequalities in the UK labour market remain evident despite nearly 40 years of government sponsored initiatives (Beck *et al*, 2006). Recent studies on gender issues in HE have however focused on accessing HE (Berggren, 2007; Lorz, Schindler & Walter, 2011) and HE services (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009), career development outcomes (Berggren, 2010) and the continued under-representation of women in certain disciplines (Blattel-Mink, 2008). Moreover, the gender differences in academic performance among undergraduates continue to be examined (Khwaileh &

Zaza, 2011; Melton & Serap, 2007; Ngozi, 2011; Somert & Fox 2012). While Harrop, Tattersall & Goody (2007) identify differences between male and female students in relation to perception of course aims and learning activities, the work did not extend to encompass external engagement activities, such as part-time working.

Gender differences are often found in students' academic self-efficacy as well as their self-efficacy to employ self-regulatory strategies. Pajares (2002) argued that these differences may be the function of factors such as previous achievement, exposure to course content, response biases, measurement practices, or gender orientation beliefs. Evidence suggests that gender differences in self-efficacy can be minimized or eliminated when students derive clear feedback on their capabilities and progress in learning (Pajares, 2002). Similarly, gender differences in rates of pay have received popular attention. The longitudinal and comprehensive study of students' transition into employment, FutureTrack Survey (2012), reported no change in pay differentials from 1995 to 2009/10, with male graduates continuing to earn more. This is more endemic in some disciplines such as law, and to a lesser extent business management, but is generally the case across all disciplines and sectors including education, languages, catering and health services where women tend to predominate.

Some of the extant studies that have examined students in full-time education have done so at pre-university level and have not examined gender differences. For example, Payne (2003) examined the impact of holding part-time jobs whilst engaged in full-time education on the achievement of secondary school students in the UK, while Patton & Smith (2010) examined the relationships between paid part-time work of secondary school students, employability and employment outcomes, and career development in Australia. In another recent study, Takeda & Homberg (2013), examined the specific effects of gender composition on students' group work, and the valuable contribution of team-working skills in employability in regard to both process and achievement, analysed through self- and peer-assessment.

Most work examining gender differences in part-time working typically explore the difficulties of balancing part-time work with personal and family commitments (Booth & van Ours, 2007; Webber & Williams, 2008), rather than the students' part-time work being an integral part of an HE scenario. Robinson's (1999) comprehensive longitudinal study in Australia, however, found some gender differences in part-time working among 17 years old students in high schools (rather than HE). Harrop *et al* (2007) demonstrated that gender matters in research relating to HE and suggested that researchers ought to be wary of conducting research into various aspects of HE without considering potential gender differences. Most studies in HE tend to treat student samples as a homogeneous group within subject disciplines and this may not bring out the value of gender differences which may be important. We therefore propose a fifth hypothesis, as outlined below:

Hypotheses 5: Gender differences will be related to students' part-time work, their career aspiration, self-efficacy, and self-theories

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedures

This study is a cross-sectional design using a survey methodology, with data collected from undergraduate business students at two post-92 universities in England. A total of 357 fully completed and usable responses were obtained (Uni-1: n = 140 (39.2%); Uni-2: n = 217 (60.8%). The

instrument used was a detailed e-survey designed to elicit structured responses and some open-ended items, providing evidence of student employment activities, their personal characteristics and self-efficacy. The questionnaire included a covering letter providing information on the purpose of the survey, guaranteeing anonymity and affirming the right to withdraw. The measures used to obtain data are detailed in the sections following.

Measures

Measure of work and study. Part-time working was measured by extending the work of Richardson *et al* (2009) which used an 11-item measure. An additional 13 items were added to enrich characteristics of part-time working and career aspirations, making a total of 24 items. Examples of items include: *My career choice has been influenced by my part-time work; I have already enquired about vacancies with my present employer when I graduate; and I have a clear idea of career when I leave university.* We use a four forced choice response option (strongly agree = 1, tend to agree = 2, tend to disagree = 3, strongly disagree = 4). Eliminating the midpoint provides a fresh alternative allowing respondents to consider their position preference. Eliminating the mid-point also minimises social desirability (Garland, 1991). Some evidence suggest that the presence or absence of a mid-point on an importance scale produces distortions in the results obtained (Garland, 1991). Whilst Weijters, *et al* (2010) provide robust arguments for and against the use of a midpoint, there is no overall evidence that the validity of data is adversely affected.

The 24 items were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA). Prior to this the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Table 1 presents full item information.

Table 1: Factor Analysis for Work and Study Scale (WANDS) (n = 357)

Rotated Component Matrix ^a	Component		
	1	2	3
Beneficial Work ($\alpha = .89$)			
My job has a beneficial impact on my studies	.755		
My part-time employer has a career path that is of interest to me when I graduate	.750		
I have already enquired about vacancies with my present employer when I graduate	.713		
My part-time working is beneficial to my studies	.696		
My part-time employer is encouraging me to remain with the company when I graduate	.676		
My job has helped me to clarify my career choice	.666		
I really enjoy my job	.641		
My career choice has been influenced by my part-time work	.623		
The experience I gain from working is more important than the money	.618		
I work to gain experience of employment	.612		
I work to improve my CV	.547		
I try to excel in my job	.523		
Career Aspiration Work ($\alpha = .74$)			
The course has helped clarify my career choice		.723	
I really enjoy my course		.716	
I expect to get an upper second class of degree or better		.663	
I have a clear idea of career when I leave university		.579	
My career choice has been influenced by my course		.578	
Functional Value Work ($\alpha = .57$)			
I work to earn money to live			.654
My part-time working reduces my study time			-.645
I work to earn money to fund my social life			.601
I cannot wait to quit this job			-.575
I would rather work overtime than attend a class/seminar			.437

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

The KMO value is .83 and the Barlett's Test of Sphericity value is significant ($p = .000$), therefore factor analysis is appropriate. The first 6 factors extracted recorded eigenvalues above 4 and these 6 factors explain a total of 60.98% of the variance. The default option in SPSS revealed a six-factor solution. Given closer examination of the factor structure and the result of our parallel analysis, it was necessary to force either a 3 or 4 factor solution. The scatterplot revealed a clear break after the third component and it was decided to retain three components for further investigation. A closer examination of the items guided a 3-factor solution decision explaining 24.8%, 14.1% and 9.5% respectively. The percentage of total variance of all 24 items explained by the three factors is 48.4%. The exploratory factor analysis shows some evidence of construct validity for the scale and a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.85. We named the factors as: Beneficial Work (12 items, $\alpha = .89$); Career Aspiration Work (5 items, $\alpha = .74$); and Functional Value Work (5 items, $\alpha = .57$). These three factors were positively and significantly inter-correlated ($p < 0.01$) and correspond largely with the findings of Richardson *et al* (2009). However, the functional work value scale does not meet the minimum alpha threshold at .57. A closer look at the five items reveals some variation in information sought which might be responsible for the low alpha. This subscale was therefore removed from further analysis.

Beneficial work is defined as the ability of the student to maximise the opportunities and added value provided by part-time work. This subscale seems to be the core of students' part-time work and alone it explains about a quarter of variance in the entire scale. It is, therefore, used as the core measure of students' part-time work. *Career aspiration work* we define as the ability of a student to utilise the link between part-time working and future career pursuit. Whereas the former helps to contextualise part-time working, the latter helps us to understand students' individual and career ambitions.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was measured using Yorke & Knight's (2007) two-component measure self-efficacy questionnaire (SEQ). These authors measured self-efficacy using 12 items divided into self-efficacy in HE (6 items) ($\alpha = .62$) and self-efficacy in the wider world (6 items) ($\alpha = .45$). As the alpha for the latter did not meet the minimum alpha threshold, we discontinued it from further analysis. Again, we used a four forced choice response option (strongly agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree). These were the same options used by Yorke & Knight (2007).

Self-theories. We also adopted the Yorke & Knight (2007) fixedness-malleability dimensions of self-theories based on Dweck's (1999) work. This is a 2-item measure. The items are: 'An individual can't change their intelligence by much' for *fixedness* and 'No matter what kind of person someone is, it is always possible for them to change significantly' for *malleability*.

Demographic profiles were sought including gender, age, level of study, if they work or not and why they do not work (where applicable), what is their prior work experience, and what industry sector they work in.

Additional data. It is common that many quantitative studies require structured responses and give little opportunity for open ended responses. Indeed, where some open ended responses are sought, it is rarely reported in data analysis. In our survey, we sought and obtained valuable responses to two open-ended questions: (1) Why don't you work part time? (2) Do you have any other comments regarding your work, study or yourself? Findings from these two questions are reported within the results section.

Variables and analysis

Part-time work (measured by beneficial work) and career aspiration work constitute our dependent variables. The independent variables are self-efficacy in HE, malleable self-theories, and fixed self-

theories. Our control variables are gender, level of study, age and work experience. Data analysis was undertaken using correlation and regression analysis as well as independent t-tests.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows means, standard deviations, and Pearson’s correlation coefficients for all the variables of the study. Females made up 57.4% of the sample, the average age of participants is around 23 years (where SD = .69), mean years worked was 4.23 years (with significant variability, where SD = 2.5); mean years with current employer was 1.74 years (with significant variability, where SD = 1.95). 11.8% of students reported that they were engaged in full-time work, while 38.1% were engaged in part-time work; those not responding were 50.1%. About 52% responded that they currently have a job while 47.9% indicated not. A total of 20 students (or 5.6% of respondents) claimed to be self-employed. Students were also spread across the three years of study, with 19.6% in year 1, 30.8% in year 2, and 49.6% in year 3. Students worked across a range of different sectors, with the majority working in the retail sector (16%), hotel and restaurants (11%), banking, finance and insurance (4.5%), and health (2%) among others. The majority of respondents (61%) did not indicate the sector in which they worked.

On average, the Work and Study Scale (WANDS) showed a varied level of agreement by respondents on its three components. Most students tended to disagree with items on the beneficial work scale (*mean* = 2.42, *SD* = .63) whereas more tended to agree with items on the career aspiration work scale. With self-efficacy in HE (*mean* = 1.95, *SD* = .47), the respondents tended to agree with most of the statements significantly. Finally, the self-theories (fixedness and malleable) responses were diametrically opposed, as would be expected. Whereas with self-theories (fixedness), the majority, about 79%, of the respondents disagreed (*mean* = 3.10, *s.d.* = .82) that “An individual can’t change their intelligence by much” the majority, about 85%, agreed with the self-theories (malleable), whereby “No matter what kind of person someone is, it is always possible for them to change significantly” (*mean* = 1.78, *s.d.* = .79).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Means, SD and Persons’ Correlations of Study Variables

Study Variables	Mean	SD	1	1.1	1.2	2	3	4
1 Work and Study Scale (WANDS)	2.32	.42	(.85)	.93**	.55**	.13*	-.03	.23**
1.1 Beneficial work	2.42	.63		(.89)	.31**	.04	-.02	.21**
1.2 Career Aspiration work	1.81	.55			(.74)	.35**	-.07	.16**
2 Self-efficacy in-HE	1.95	.47				(.62)	-.23**	.12*
3 Self-Theories – Fixedness	3.10	.82					-	-.34**
4 Self-Theories – Malleable	1.78	.79						-

Notes: (2-tailed); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $n = 357$; Alpha reliability coefficients are reported in parenthesis where applicable

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 suggests that students’ part-time work will positively affect their career aspiration. Students’ part-time work was measured with the beneficial work subscale and their career choice and aspiration with the career aspiration work subscale, both as defined earlier. Regression analysis between the two variables beneficial work (part-time work) and career aspiration is $R^2 = .097$, $\beta = .312$, $p > .000$. The total variance explained by the model was 9.7%, $F(1, 324) = 34.832$, $p > .000$. This

suggests part-time work is a good and statistically significant predictor of career aspiration but accounting for only 9.7% of its variation. We therefore accept our hypothesis 1. This result suggests a strong link between the ability of students to maximise the opportunities and value added by part-time work, and their ability to utilise this to inform their future career. Students who work part-time and value this opportunity are likely to have a high career drive and strive to enhance their employability.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that students' self-efficacy will positively affect their part-time work (beneficial work) and career aspiration. Model 2 (Table 5) presents the regression coefficient for self-efficacy and beneficial work which is positive but not significant ($\beta = .359, p > .05$). However, model 6 (Table 5) shows a positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 2.607, p < .01$) relationship for self-efficacy and career aspiration work. Thus hypothesis 2 is partially supported, while self-efficacy significantly predicts career aspiration, it does not predict beneficial work (part-time work). We can thus infer that the higher a students' self-efficacy in HE, the more positive they would also be with respect to their career aspiration but not necessarily part-time work. This implies that students who are more self-confident, and possess high self-efficacy, are also those who tend to have a higher drive in terms of their career aspiration.

In hypothesis 3, we predict that students' fixed self-theories will negatively affect their part-time work and career aspiration. Table 5 shows the regression coefficient for fixed self-theories and beneficial work (model 3) which is negative but not significant ($\beta = -.884, p > .05$) and similarly for career aspiration (model 7) which is also negative but not significant ($\beta = -1.184, p > .05$). Hypothesis 3 is therefore not supported. The predicted direction of the relationship is however supported, meaning the stronger a student believes that things are fixed and people have little chance of making a difference, the less likely they are to engage with part-time work and the more likely they are to have lower career aspiration drive.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that students' malleable self-theories will positively affect their part-time work and career aspiration. In table 5 we present the regression coefficient for malleable self-theories and beneficial work (model 4) which is positive and significant ($\beta = 2.491, p < .05$). For career aspiration (model 7), the relationship, while also positive, is not significant ($\beta = .800, p > .05$). This can be interpreted to mean that students who hold strong views that things are malleable, and people make a difference, are more likely to maximise the opportunities and value added provided by part-time work. However, this does not translate to higher career aspiration drive, as shown by the statistically insignificant relationship for this variable.

Table 3: Responses to two items relating to self-theories

	Tend to Agree (%)		Tend to Disagree (%)	
	This study	Yorke & Knight (2007)	This study	Yorke & Knight (2007)
An individual can't change their intelligence by much. (<i>Self-theories – Fixedness</i>)	20.7	28.5	79.3	71.5
No matter what kind of person someone is, it is always possible for them to change significantly. (<i>Self-theories – Malleable</i>)	84.5	70.7	15.5	29.3

The result in table 3 compares findings from this study with those of Yorke & Knight (2007) using the same items on self-theories. The very high percentage of over 84% of respondents that tend to agree with malleable (self-theories) and the 79% that tend to disagree with fixedness (self-theories) compares well with the earlier findings of Yorke & Knight (2007). The majority of students tend to disagree that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed, while most agree that people are flexible and have potential to change.

Table 4: Independent t test (Gender)

	Mean		t-test for Equality of Means		
	Male	Female	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Work and Study Scale (WANDS)	2.35	2.30	1.112	314.9	.267
Beneficial Work	2.43	2.41	.349	322.3	.727
Career Aspiration Work	1.88	1.76	1.895	324	.059
Self-efficacy in-HE	1.96	1.94	.296	302	.768
Self-Theories – Fixedness	3.15	3.07	.862	302	.390
Self-Theories – Malleable	1.68	1.85	-1.769	302	.078

Hypothesis 5 suggests that gender differences will affect students' part-time work, their career aspiration, self-efficacy, and self-theories. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the scores for males and females (table 4). No significant difference was found between males and females on all study variables. We therefore do not find support for gender differences affecting students' part-time work, their career aspiration, self-efficacy, and self-theories and reject hypothesis 5.

Table 5: Multiple OLS Regression Results for Beneficial Work and Career Aspiration Work

	DV: Beneficial Work				DV: Career Aspiration Work			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
(Intercept)	3.133*** (.260)	3.059*** (.332)	3.265*** (.406)	2.726*** (.453)	2.289*** (.209)	1.871*** (.260)	2.086*** (.316)	1.948*** (.361)
Gender	-.604 (.102)	-.604 (.102)	-.648 (.103)	-1.010 (.102)	-1.501 (.082)	-1.542 (.080)	-1.603 (.080)	-1.699 † (.081)
Age	-1.193 (.117)	-1.168 (.117)	-1.149 (.117)	-1.001 (.116)	-1.280 (.094)	-1.159 (.092)	-1.137 (.092)	-1.079 (.092)
Level of study	-2.905** (.085)	-2.915** (.085)	-2.745** (.086)	-2.833** (.085)	-1.179 (.068)	-1.404 (.067)	-1.210 (.067)	-1.220 (.067)
Work experience	.896 (.021)	.885 (.021)	.982 (.021)	.802 (.021)	1.549 (.017)	1.528 (.016)	1.658 † (.017)	1.588 (.017)
Self-efficacy in HE		.359 (.106)	.077 (.111)	.412 (.110)		2.607** (.083)	2.135* (.087)	2.220* (.088)
Self-theories – Fixedness			-.884 (.067)	.109 (.071)			-1.184 (.052)	-.792 (.056)
Self-theories – Malleable				2.491* (.071)				.800 (.056)
R-square	.114	.114	.120	.158	.059	.103	.112	.117
Δ R-square	-	.001	.005	.039	-	.044	.009	.004
F	4.422	3.541	3.077	3.624	2.151	3.152	2.868	2.543
p-value	.002	.005	.007	.001	.078	.010	.012	.017
N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143

Note: Regression coefficients are reported and their standard errors in brackets. Significance code: ***p < .001; **P < .01; *p < .05; † P < .1. DV: dependent variable

DISCUSSION

The study seeks to investigate the importance and value of self-efficacy and self-theories (as indicators of personality and value), career aspiration and working part-time among undergraduate business students in two post-92 universities in England. The majority of students seem to be clear about their career aspiration and the value of their HE qualification in furthering this. Overall, our results show that level of study ($\beta = -2.833$, $p < .01$) and malleable self-theories ($\beta = 2.491$, $p < .05$) are the strongest predictors of part-time work (model 4 in table 5) while self-efficacy in HE ($\beta = 2.220$, $p < .05$) is the strongest predictor of career aspiration (model 8 in table 5). This finding upholds the importance of the individual values, as depicted in malleable self-theories, to part-time working among students in HE. Similarly self-efficacy (a personality measure) significantly predicts career aspiration work. Generally, whilst embedding part-time working and employability will remain critical for HEIs, understanding individual values and their self-efficacy will be equally valuable in understanding part-time work and career aspirations of individual students. HEIs will therefore continue to play an important role in the realisation of this value in the foreseeable future. This study also considered and examined gender differences given the claim by Harrop *et al* (2007) that gender matters in HE research but we did not find any significant gender differences in any of the study variables.

The rest of the discussion section is organised around the four key issues that this study sets out to investigate (1) Part-time work and career aspiration (2) Part-time work, self-efficacy and self-theories (3) The role of gender differences (4) Why some students do not work part-time?

Part-time work and career aspiration

If indeed business degrees provide better job opportunities (Piotrowski & Cox, 2004) and students engaging in part-time jobs enhance their future job prospects and employability (Leung & Kember, 2005; Muldoon, 2009), it is not a surprise that our result suggests a strong and significant relationship between engaging in part-time work and career aspiration. Perhaps the real question is whether students appreciate the value of skills acquired while they engage in such part-time work, rather than simply enjoying any financial rewards. The extent to which students appreciate the value of part-time work in preparing them for the world of full-time employment is uncertain. However, there is evidence that the individual skills and attributes which they are able to develop through part-time work alongside the academic knowledge developed through higher education enhance individual career prospects. Much as universities strive to integrate the development of soft skills alongside the core technical knowledge required by the curriculum, the additional value that the opportunity of part-time work adds is unique. Students who understand and appreciate these inter-linkages will seek and benefit from part-time work and demonstrate high career aspirations. This seems to be a reasonable explanation for the significant positive relationship the results reveal between part-time work, as measured by beneficial work, and career aspiration. Beneficial work confirms the ability of students to maximise the value provided by part-time work and career aspiration reveals a further desire to pursue this link through future successful career pursuits.

Part-time work, self-efficacy and self-theories

Self-efficacy has an important effect on an individual's approach to challenges, goals and aspirations. Do students see part-time work as a challenge or an opportunity? When confronted with the challenge of part-time work, are they convinced that they can succeed, especially as they combine it with their full-time studies? Individuals with strong self-efficacy are those who believe that they are capable of performing well. Such individuals are more likely to view challenges as something to be mastered rather than avoided. They would therefore see an opportunity in part-time work and would probably use it positively.

The result of this study with respect to the measure of self-efficacy is split. While the relationship between self-efficacy and beneficial work is positive but not significant, that between self-efficacy and career aspiration work is both positive and significant. Yorke & Knight (2007) suggested that there is some commonality in self-efficacy, whether the focus is on studies in HE or action in the wider world. In this study we focus on self-efficacy in HE and our results guide us to argue that this concept measures a unique aspect of personality and that students with high self-efficacy in HE also have a high drive for career aspiration, but not necessarily a high commitment to part-time working.

The critical importance of accurate self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-belief in attaining success, fulfillment and contentment has been widely acknowledged by psychologists, educators and social commentators. Yet, our finding on self-efficacy is similar to Yorke & Knight (2007) when it comes to the role that luck plays in employment in the 'wider world'. Albeit, these authors did not disclose specific figures, we found that almost 59% of the respondents tend to agree that luck will probably be influential in what they achieve in employment. This is the one item that stands out with an agree/disagree split close to 60%-40% whereas for all other items measuring self-efficacy about one in four (75%) tended to agree. This is particularly interesting given that nearly 80% tended to agree that 'luck doesn't play much of a part in what I achieve academically'. Clearly, while students may not attribute much of their academic success to luck, when it comes to employment they seem to become more skeptical. By including and exploring how self-efficacy might affect part-time work and career aspiration in our investigation, this research opens an opportunity for deeper interrogation of the inner self with the attendant biases, misconceptions and illusions.

The findings with respect to self-theories as fixed or malleable suggest that the majority of students hold the view that intelligence is not fixed and can therefore be changed, while most equally believe that people are flexible and that change is possible. Our finding shows that malleable self-theories significantly predict beneficial work. This implies that students who view people as malleable are more likely to make the most of part-time work because they see individual effort as important, therefore they will maximise opportunities for part-time work to improve their employability skills.

Gender differences in part-time work, career aspiration and self-efficacy

The positive development of growing gender equality, and perhaps closing gender gaps in many aspects of life, makes our finding that there are no significant gender differences on all study variables not particularly surprising. Female and male students were not significantly different in their responses on part-time working generally, and specifically on career aspiration, and self-efficacy in HE and self-theories (malleable and fixed). The mean value for males and females on all study variables were very close. Gender differences amongst students in HE on several dimensions remains controversial and is comprehensively discussed in several studies (such as Harrop *et al*, 2007). For example, in related previous studies, while Trueman & Hartley (1996) found female students reporting significantly higher time-management skills than males, Harrop *et al* (2007) found no significant difference in '*organising time*' and '*finding time to study*'. An important implication of this finding is the need to be more cautious when explaining gender similarities and differences as some of the arguments are coloured by widely held stereotypes about gender differences. Whilst some gender differences may be endowed by nature, academic achievement, career success and aspiration might have a lot more to do with the desire, passion, effort, and commitment of individuals.

Why some students do not work part-time?

The respondents who do not work part-time were asked why they do not work part-time. The responses include the following: *Don't want to detract from studies* (60.7%); *Not enough time* (23.0%); *Adequate support from family* (14.1%) and *I'm on a sponsorship/bursary* (2.2%). There were

also a range of other reasons identified through the open ended qualitative responses. A total of 41 open-ended comments were made. The open-ended responses revealed two main response categories or themes.

Active part-time job seekers

The first category relates to respondents who are unable to secure a job and these include five, likely to be international students, who were waiting appropriate documentation to enable them work. Twelve indicated that they were unable to get a job despite, in some cases, making extensive applications. One respondent commented that *"I applied to 10 jobs over the course of 2 years. None of them reply/seem to want students even though I have 4 years' experience in the position"*, whilst a second claimed to have *"Handed out CV's and filled out online applications but all came back unsuccessful"*.

Given the importance that students attach to part-time working, whether for financial or career development reasons, this lack of success raises questions as to the role of HEIs in helping students to secure paid employment.

Part-time work would undermine study

However, there were indications that students realised that part-time working impinged on study time, and so were reluctant to seek employment in order to concentrate efforts on their studies, especially in the final year. One respondent recognised that *"Although any extra money would be appreciated I don't want it to come at the cost of my degree"*. Another stated that *"I would like to focus more on university work during my fourth year and will not be working part time"*, whilst a third claimed that *"this is the first time since the age of 16 having not had regular employment, purely to focus entirely on the final year of my studies. It's a squeeze"*.

This category of students – those dedicated to their studies – reconciled to one of the types identified by Hodgson & Spours (2001) labelled "the deliberate non-workers". Hodgson & Spours (2001) argue that such students fall into one of three categories: rich parents who can help them sustain their desired lifestyle, strong commitment to other extra-curricular activities (such as sport, music or drama), or simply educationally focused. It appears that these responses suggest students are simply educationally focused and keen to ensure academic success.

It is common in surveys to have dedicated questions for any other comments from respondents. Equally common is the fact that few studies report findings from this aspect of their research. In this study, a content analysis of the other comments from respondents was undertaken. Several key themes emerged from the "other comments" section on the questionnaire. The respondents were asked: Do you have any other comments regarding your work, study or yourself? There were a total of 71 responses from the two universities (29 and 42 respectively).

Part-time work is a financial necessity

In particular, the financial necessity of working part-time came up in several responses. This is exemplified by comments from one student who stated that *"actually I work not because I want to, but because I have to"*, while a second student noted that *"having a part time job for most students is a necessity/bonus as money is short"*.

This financial driver confirms previous academic studies on student working (Richardson *et al*, 2009). Yet, it seems even more relevant in the new fee environment, and that in order to survive the period of full-time study at university, the financial support afforded by part-time working is vital. This is exemplified by a comment that *"I need the money as my maintenance loan minus my rent for the*

year (not including bills) leaves me with £100 to spare. This has left me living out of my overdraft which I have recently had to increase just so that I can afford necessities”.

There were also suggestions that universities should be more attuned to the diverse range of student circumstances, and make appropriate allowances for those who have to work part-time to survive at university, since they have less time to devote to study. One student commented that *“consideration needs to be taken by the Uni that people who get a larger loan/grant will often not have to work, whereas people with a smaller loan/grant will often have to work, meaning they have less time to study”.*

Balancing part-time work with academic studies

The work activity described by students included those who indicated that they worked full-time or more than 15 hours per week part-time whilst undertaking their full-time degree studies. This is a significant figure, since previous academic studies have suggested that 15 or more hours per week part-time working is detrimental to academic performance (Neil *et al*, 2004). The difficulties of balancing the demands of academic workload and part-time working was prevalent in the comments, with increased stress and an associated compromise of academic performance noted as the consequences. One respondent noted that *“I worked 20 hours as a supervisor in a retail store during my first year, but during my second year it was almost impossible to keep this up whilst studying and the stress of having so much to do made me quit”.* A final year student commented that *“I feel that having a part-time job whilst in my final year of University does reduce the amount of hours I have to do my University work and research”.* Meanwhile, a third respondent admitted that *“I worked 2 jobs during my first and second year, but found that it affected my academic grades”.*

The future career value of part-time work

Nonetheless, there were students who recognised the value of part-time work, because of the anticipation that it will yield future career opportunities. Here, it seems that a longer-term perspective is adopted, which negates the immediate problems of balancing work and study. One respondent commented that the *“effort you put in now will pay off later. It is not about luck – if you have worked hard and have been proactive enough to seek opportunities that will benefit you in the long run-then you deserve the good it will bring: be it monetary or achieving personal goals”.* Another student stated that *“I definitely recognise the benefits of working this much. If I graduate with a 2:1 or a first with 4 years of solid industry experience, I feel my chances of gaining a place on a top graduate scheme will be increased significantly”*, whilst a third commented that *“I believe working has given many life skills which have really given me an advantage when I go to interviews for graduate schemes”.*

Moreover, work placement was perceived to be especially valuable in supporting career aspirations. This is evidenced by the comment that the *“placement year has been the most significant point for me. I feel I have come back to Uni rather than a student at Uni, I feel like a worker at Uni.”* However, what students did not acknowledge was the contribution that a placement can have on final award classification, as suggested by Green (2011), whereby students save sufficient money during the placement year to avoid having to work part-time on return to full-time studies. This view is exemplified by the comment that *“During my placement year I saved enough money not to have to work during my final year at university to hopefully improve my overall grade.”*

Implications of findings and future research

The key implications of our findings relate largely to a number of interrelated areas of higher education. First is the important role that part-time work plays in the development of career

aspirations amongst students in HE, as demonstrated by the statistically significant relationship between the two (the former as significant predictor of the latter). The implication of this is that students engaged in part-time work are likely to be more career-driven. In addition to the obvious financial incentives and rewards, the enhancement of employability skills is seen as a key benefit for such students. Whilst this finding has neither been investigated nor reported in extant studies, it opens both challenges and opportunities for further research in the area.

The second is an understanding of how important the role of personality (self-efficacy) and individual values (self-theories) are in students' decision to work, or not work, part-time. The finding of self-efficacy as a significant predictor of career aspiration suggests a strong association between the personality of the individual and their decision to embark on part-time work or not. Similarly, malleable self-theories (strong belief in individuals being changeable and not fixed) emerging as a significant predictor of part-time work (beneficial work) also suggests the value of a better understanding of the complexities of individual personalities, and values, when making decisions on employability among students. What we cannot establish, because we did not investigate it, is whether there are particular personality types that may support part-time work. Similarly, we wonder whether our independent variables, such as self-efficacy in HE and the self-theories, might themselves be influenced by the impact of part-time work. It may be that there is the possibility of a feedback cycle. This is significant because it might enable us to understand how the students' experience of employment might inform their employability agenda. We therefore propose that these two interrelated lines of enquiry require carefully planned future investigation.

Third, part of the value contributed by the qualitative data relates to the value of employers' contribution in the development of skills and career aspirations of full-time students who work part-time. Do students need to engage their employers (while on part-time employment) more in the development of their future career aspirations and transferable skills? Such engagement, if encouraged, could enhance the overall quality and value-added of part-time work for full-time students in higher education.

Fourth, this study is ambitious in attempting to extend our understanding of student's self-beliefs and perhaps the potential generalizability to other HEIs (such as the pre-92 and 'new' universities). This potential value is hampered by the data being limited to two post-92 HEIs. The discipline of study (Business Management) and type of institution (post-1992) are both critical context issues in situating our discussion and understanding of the foregoing analysis. Clearly, a pre-1992 and post-1992 distinction, or what the Future Track (2012) report categorised as high, medium and low tariff HEIs, are potentially important in shaping career aspirations. Similarly, FutureTrack (2012) reported Business and Administrative studies graduates as achieving the highest levels of employment as well as having the most equal proportions of males and females, making it an attractive discipline with high employability potentials. However, while we recognise the importance of the context (see FutureTrack, 2012 for full data), the purpose and focus of this study, given the sample used, is designed to provide a deeper interrogation of Business Schools within similar HEIs, rather than generalizability across all types of HEIs in the UK. Future studies that seek to extend the sample across a range of HEIs would be particularly illuminating and well received.

In parallel, there are a number of implications for curriculum design and the extent to which course teams are able to integrate the development of 'soft' skills both within, and alongside, the core curriculum. The conventional placement year, offered by over 80% of Business Schools in The UK (21st Century Leaders Report, 2014), is perhaps the most widely utilised mechanism to support the development of employability. Internships or work-based learning projects, developed in collaboration between HEIs and local employers, can be integrated within courses to foster the development of soft skills amongst students and expose employers to the fresh thinking that undergraduate students might bring into the organisation. Such projects might also act to facilitate

purposeful engagement between students and employers, and help students find paid part-time employment which is designed to be compatible with their studies and potentially even contribute to the accumulation of credit towards their degree.

In conclusion, the examination of the relationship among part-time working, career aspiration, gender differences and individual personality undertaken by this study have shown that career aspiration (which is an important core) and individual personality (explained by self-efficacy and malleability) are valuable for a better understanding of part-time working among students in full-time higher education. These findings and their implications extend our knowledge of the complexities and intricacies of part-time working among students.

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