The Purpose of Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Educators and Students

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Abstract

This paper explores the perceptions of the purpose of higher education (HE) among students and educators at the University of Groningen. Using a sample of 202 participants, including 167 students and 35 educators, the study employs quantitative methods to examine differences between attitudes (current perceptions) and beliefs (ideal expectation) regarding HE's purpose. The analysis reveals significant differences between attitudes and beliefs within both groups, particularly in the dimensions of content taught to students, the educators´ role, and the universitys´ role. The findings show that students emphasize both pragmatic values, such as practical skills and career readiness, and holistic values, such as critical thinking and lifelong learning, whereas educators primarily emphasize the latter. Despite these internal differences, a notable alignment exists between students and educators on many aspects, suggesting a shared recognition of the gaps in current HE practices. The findings underscore the need for HE institutions to balance vocational training with broader educational goals, integrating career development with intellectual and personal growth. This alignment could inform policy reforms, curriculum development, and teaching methods to better meet the diverse expectations of HE stakeholders.

Keywords: higher education, university education, purpose, students, educators.

The Purpose of Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Educators and Students

During the 2023/24 academic year, Dutch higher education (HE) institutions admitted 801,460 students, approximately 22% of whom were born outside of the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). This diversity shows that HE in the Netherlands transcends national boundaries, reflecting a change in HE because it was initially designed to educate future ruling elites, whereas now it has "massified", leading to a broader public discourse on HE´s purpose and value. This shift can be explained by the increased diversifying and growing student body, which has expanded viewpoints on the purpose of HE (Chan, 2016). Today, these viewpoints represent distinct perspectives from many stakeholders, such as policymakers, educators, and students. Even within the same stakeholder groups, divergent opinions are frequently present (Labaree, 1997; Barnett, 2004). For instance, Aarhus University published a book of different abstracts with universities stating their purpose in HE, which range from emphasizing the economic utility of education to fostering individual intellectual growth and societal responsibility (Bengtsen et al., 2017). This variation underscores the broader public discourse and the differing perceptions of stakeholders on what HE's purpose and value ought to be.

In this research paper, 'purpose' refers to the fundamental questions of what a university's main educational goals are and why individuals should pursue HE. Hirsh (2010) defines purpose as an existential metric shaped by personal objectives, which influence behavior. Engaging in activities without a clear goal has significant societal repercussions because it can lead to a lack of direction and purpose in individuals' lives, which may result in decreased productivity, motivation, and overall well-being. This concept is crucial for policymakers and influential figures in HE, as well as for individuals, since clear objectives can guide behavior. Our discussion focuses exclusively on universities, using 'university education' and 'higher education' interchangeably, while excluding colleges and other forms.

Although Barnett (2022) suggests various hybrid models, this paper will not examine them. This focus allows for a more precise analysis. For instance, universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands have clearer, practice-oriented purposes compared to traditional university degrees, especially in fields not directly leading to specific job-related skills or titles outside academia .

Globalization has further expanded the role of HE, positioning it as an important responder to global events and as bridges between cultures (Barnett, 2004; Tight, 2024). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities conducted essential research and shared data to inform public health strategies, integrating these activities into educational programs (World Economic Forum, 2020). This underscores their capacity to mediate and address global issues effectively while highlighting the evolving role of HE in responding to global events, pointing to the necessity of reevaluating HE´s goals to meet contemporary needs (Barnett, 2004; Chan, 2016). The need for this reevaluation is further driven by varying standards among companies for credentials and abilities. The reevaluation of HE´s needs is intensified by the rise of for-profit universities and shifting social expectations that call for more skilled graduates (Cheng, 2022; Kezar, 2004). In today's globalized environment, HE institutions must balance career training, personal growth, and social contributions to meet the diverse expectations of stakeholders, reflecting the complex interplay between labour market demands and educational missions (Chan, 2016; Labaree, 1997).

Previous research has largely focused on the aims and outcomes of primary and secondary education, but HE still lacks a cohesive philosophical framework, resulting in fragmented policies and unclear goals (Barnett, 2004). Scholars such as Barnett (2022), Chan (2016), and Tight (2023) have emphasized this deficiency, noting that despite developments over the past few decades, the understanding of HE's purposes remains sparse. The formation of the International Society for Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education (PaTHES) in

2017 aims to address this gap, yet Barnett (2022) argues that more research is needed to fully comprehend HE's evolving roles (PaTHES, 2021). Without a clear philosophical foundation, HE institutions struggle to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders and adapt to contemporary challenges.

Various scholarly perspectives on the purpose of HE, provide a foundation for our study. Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy views education as a tool for emancipation, emphasizing the development of critical consciousness and societal engagement. This approach encourages students to challenge societal norms and actively participate in social change. Martha Nussbaum (1997) complements this by advocating for an education that not only promotes intellectual skills but also fosters empathy, ethical understanding, and global awareness, preparing students to be responsible global citizens. Sam Peach's "Socially Critical Vocationalism" (2010) bridges academic learning with vocational training, promoting curricula that are both practically relevant and socially aware. This ensures graduates are job-ready while also being ethically and socially responsible (Peach, 2010). Similarly, Kristján Kristjánsson (2017) emphasizes holistic human development through education, advocating for the integration of intellectual, moral, and emotional growth to achieve true happiness and well-being.

In contrast to these transformative perspectives, Pierre Bourdieu's social reproduction theory (1990) highlights how HE systems perpetuate social hierarchies through cultural and educational capital. According to Bourdieu, the educational system plays a crucial role in maintaining societal power structures by legitimizing the transmission of cultural capital across generations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Similarly, credentialism theory argues that the value of education is often measured by the credentials it provides rather than the skills or knowledge gained. This perspective suggests that the educational system reinforces existing social inequalities by privileging certain credentials over others, thereby maintaining the

status quo (Collins, 1979). In sum, the presented perspectives underline a critical debate: whether education serves as a means of social emancipation and personal growth or as a mechanism for sustaining existing social structures and inequalities. These viewpoints underscore the diverse and sometimes even contrasting aims of HE, which include both practical skill development and broader societal contributions, guiding our research framework.

This debate is mirrored in the varying perspectives of stakeholders on the purpose of HE. A unifying vision of quality and purpose in HE is elusive since stakeholders have differing and conflicting expectations. According to Watty (2006), academic accountants in Australia point out a mismatch between the practical definitions of educational quality that are now in use, which are focused on graduating students who are prepared for the workforce, and an ideal that promotes critical thinking and lifelong learning. This reflects a larger conflict that exists across HE institutions around the world, where the need for efficiency frequently takes precedence over an individual's holistic development.

According to Al-Amri et al. (2020), students, faculty, and employers have varying priorities regarding what constitutes quality. Employers often prioritize research skills and practical applications relevant to industry needs, while students tend to focus more on the quality of teaching and learning. This divergence highlights the necessity for comprehensive quality assurance processes that can reconcile these differing expectations. Similarly, students in six European nations appreciate HE for its role in personal and societal progress as well as its ability to improve professional opportunities, according to research by Rachel Brooks et al. (2021). These results cast doubt on the constrained, utilitarian understanding of HE as only a means of obtaining employment and support courses that prepare students for the workforce while also encouraging civic involvement.

Additionally, the research on the public goals of HE conducted by Cuellar et al. (2022)

shows that students have trouble finding a balance between more general societal responsibilities such as community involvement and democratic participation with more personal benefits like economic success and social mobility. This reinforces the necessity of educational policies that uphold public and democratic ideals in addition to commercial pressures, guaranteeing that HE institutions successfully contribute to the well-being of individuals and the larger society.

The complexity of aligning educational goals with societal expectations is further compounded by individual differences that can be attributed to several factors, including differences in disciplinary backgrounds, generational gaps, and educational ideologies. Another variable involved is a competitive and unpredictable job market, in which students may prioritize tangible returns on their educational investments, seeking degrees that promise better employment prospects and higher salaries (Jonbekova, 2020). Faculty, on the other hand, may support a more comprehensive educational program that develops lifelong learners and knowledgeable citizens, since they are frequently strongly ingrained in the customs and ideals of academia (Golding, 2013). In conclusion, the debate over the purpose of HE is essential and necessitates a dedicated discipline to explore these complex issues. Such a discipline would facilitate discussions that address the varying and often conflicting expectations of stakeholders, including students, educators, and employers.

To address these issues, this thesis seeks to explore the multifaceted perceptions of the purpose of HE. This study is mostly descriptive and exploratory in nature as the field of HE philosophy is still developing and the purpose of HE needs yet to be more clearly elaborated. Therefore, the three aims of this research are more speculative: Firstly, whether there are differences between what students perceive the HE purpose to be like (attitude) and what HE purpose should be like (belief). Secondly, whether there are differences between attitude and belief among educators regarding the purpose of HE. Lastly, whether there are differences

between educators and students regarding a possible gap between attitude and belief about the purpose of HE. The differentiation we use is based on Watty (2006), who distinguished between attitudes and beliefs by examining perceptions of HE's purpose. Attitudes reflect current views of what HE is like, while beliefs represent what it should be like. This framework guides our exploration of these differences within students and educators. The study aims to identify any possible differences and similarities between these two groups´ perspectives, which are crucial for guiding educational policies and practices because these insights can help align educational programs with the needs and expectations of both main stakeholders of HE (Chan, 2016). Understanding these perspectives can inform curriculum development, teaching methods, and policy decisions to create a more effective and relevant higher education system. Moreover, a thorough comprehension of the tenets of HE may shed light on important matters such as educational accessibility and diversity. Tight (2023), for instance, discusses the necessity of developing curricula that take into account modern topics like internationalization, gender, employment, and decolonization. This poses the important question: Should all of these concepts be covered in a HE curriculum? Are these issues relevant to all faculties at universities? Depending on whether the purpose of HE is to create appealing graduates or to further human knowledge, it becomes imperative to modify the university's curriculum and possibly its whole organizational structure. Potential differences found between the current and ideal perceptions in our study could help inform this gap.

Methods

Participants

A total of 294 participants accessed the link for this study, of whom 203 completed the study. The research team decided collaboratively to exclude one participant due to consistently answering with extreme options, completing the survey in only six minutes and leaving a political message at the end, indicating missing attention during the completion of

the questionnaire. Thus, our effective sample size consists of 202 participants, giving a completion rate of approximately 69%. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M = 25.54$, $SD = 9.78$). The gender distribution was as follows: 146 females (72.3%), 53 males (26.2%), 1 non-binary individual (0.5%), 1 individual who specified another gender (0.5%), and 1 individual who preferred not to say (0.5%). The most common nationality among participants was Dutch, with 95 individuals (47.0%), followed by German with 39 individuals (19.3%). Inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years or older and either a current student or educator in the Netherlands. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling methods, including targeted advertisements on university social media groups such as WhatsApp and Instagram, posters placed in university buildings, and through the SONA system, which is used for recruiting first-year psychology students for research participation. First-year psychology students received SONA credits as an incentive for participating, while other participants had a chance to win one of five 30-euro dinner coupons. The University of Groningen's Ethics Board granted ethical permission for the study prior to recruiting, and all participants provided informed consent before beginning and a debrief with the possibility to ask questions after completion of the survey.

Procedure

Participants were given the option to access the questionnaire either through a URL or a QR code. The questionnaire began with a brief introduction explaining the study's objectives. After agreeing to participate, individuals were asked to identify their primary role in education as either a student or an educator. Both groups were then instructed to provide demographic details, including age, gender, and nationality. Students were further asked to specify their educational level, program, and academic year, while educators provided information about the program they teach and their job title.

Following the demographic section, students rated their personal reasons for studying.

Both students and educators then rated the reasons they would recommend studying to a friend or loved one. Participants received a brief explanation of how to answer the following questions and had to acknowledge their understanding before proceeding. They then responded to three statements about their general sense of purpose. Next, participants moved to the following section, where they responded to statements presented in two columns, indicating to what extent they believed these statements should be taught and are taught to students by the university. This response method was repeated for additional sections, including 11 statements about the aims of educators within the university and 12 statements regarding the aims of universities in HE.

After completing the main questionnaire, students estimated their average grade. Both students and educators then rated their satisfaction with their university experience. Following this, both groups completed the self-efficacy scale. Participants then answered a mandatory open-ended question inviting additional comments on the purpose of university education. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and given the opportunity to enter a lottery.

Materials and Instruments

Data collection was conducted using Qualtrics, an online survey platform that facilitates the creation, distribution, and analysis of surveys. Qualtrics was used to present the questionnaire to participants and collect their responses in an organized and secure manner. For data analysis, SPSS software was used to perform statistical analyses. The questionnaire collected demographic data including age, gender, nationality, academic level, study program, academic year, and average grade. Educators were additionally asked about their teaching program and job titles. The survey used in this study comprised several items. Primarily, it was based on theories such as social reproduction theory (Broadfoot, 1978; Shakeel & Peterson, 2023), resource dependency theory (Powell & Rey, 2015), the humanistic

perspective (Farmer, 1984; Kiaei, 2017), credentialism (Guan & Blair, 2022), human capital theory (Fényes & Mohácsi, 2020; Marginson, 2019), and critical Pedagogy (Martin, 2017), each highlighting a specific concept regarding the purpose of HE. The first section, which was only presented to students, comprised nine items designed to understand participants' motivations for attending university. Participants assessed these items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 5 (*describes me extremely well*). A sample item from this section is: "I study to develop a social network". The second section required participants to rate the same nine items, but based on why they would recommend HE to significant others. An example item is: "I would advise my friend/loved one to study to develop a social network". The third section utilized a comparative approach to measure differences between the attitude and belief about the purpose of HE. This section consisted of three blocks, each covering a different dimension: the content taught to students (*Student*), the role of educators (*Educator*), and the role of university´s (*University*), from here on they will be referred to as *Student, Educator and University* dimension. Participants responded to two categories using a 5-point Likert scale , ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). For the *Student* dimension an example item was: "University students are/should be taught to think creatively". For the *Educator* dimension, a sample item was: "University educators do/should aim to create an interactive classroom environment". For the *University* dimension an example item was: "Universities do/should aim to develop a culture of lifelong learning."

To investigate possible relationships between factors, several subscales were included in the questionnaire. We included a scale, derived from the Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale (MEMS; George & Park, 2016b), which evaluates participants' overall sense of purpose in life ($\alpha = .89$). The scale was modified by discarding items related to purpose measuring comprehension and meaning, and shortened the remaining five items to three to

reduce survey completion time. A sample item was: "I have certain life goals that compel me to keep going". Another subscale required participants to rate their satisfaction as university students or educators on a 5-point scale from "*extremely dissatisfied*" to "*extremely satisfied*". A sample item was: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience as a university student?". The next subscale we used was the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), which measured participants' confidence in their abilities (α = .76). The original 10-item scale was used, with participants rating each item on a 4-point scale from "*not at all true*" to "*exactly true*". A sample item from this scale was: "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort". As this research was part of a joint project with other members, various subscales were included to address different research aims. However, these subscales, including the reasons for studying and reasons for recommending studying, are not within the scope of this bachelor thesis and will not be discussed in this paper.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Firstly, we analyzed the data scores of students and educators separately so that we could analyze differences within each group and between. Starting with the average responses across groups for attitude and belief in the *Student* dimension. The highest mean score for attitude was found in "Learn critical thinking skills" ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.86$), the lowest mean score was found in "Prioritize education over other interests" ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.06$). The highest mean score for belief was observed in "Learn critical thinking skills" ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.48$), the lowest mean score was found in "Contemplate societal issues" ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.97$). For more detailed results see Figure B1 in Appendix B.

For the *Educator* dimension, the highest mean score for attitude was in "Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students" ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.69$), the lowest in "Not impose a

strong political direction in the classroom" ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.07$). The highest mean score for belief was "Instill applicable knowledge and skills onto their students" ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.63$), the lowest "Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom" ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.20$) For more detailed results see Figure B2 in Appendix B.

For the *University* dimension, the highest average for attitude was found in "Expand the knowledge of humankind" ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.80$), the lowest in "Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful" ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.13$). The highest score for belief was observed in "Offer support to students, staff, etc., in times of crisis" ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.64$), the lowest in "Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful" ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 0.52$) For more detailed results see Figure B3 in Appendix B.

Looking at the average response of exclusively students the highest and lowest statements were the same as for educators and students overall response. See Figure B4, B5 and B6 in Appendix B for more detailed results. The highest and lowest average response among educators differed compared to students and both groups. For attitude in *Student* dimension, the highest mean was for "Develop professional skills" ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.69$), while the lowest was for "Develop personal skills" ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.85$). In the belief category, the highest was "Develop social skills" ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.41$), and the lowest was "Contemplate societal issues" ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 0.86$). For more detailed results see Figure B7 in Appendix B. For attitude in the *Educator* dimension, the highest mean was "Instill applicable knowledge and skills" ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.74$), and the lowest was "Not impose a strong political direction" ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.00$). In the belief category, the highest was "Prioritize education over other interests" ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.89$), while the lowest was "Not impose a strong political direction" ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.12$) For more detailed results see Figure B8 in Appendix B. For attitude in the *university* dimension, the highest mean was "Expand

the knowledge of humankind" ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.74$), and the lowest was "Improve its status on global rankings" ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.03$). Lastly, in the belief category, the highest mean was "Include practical courses that resemble real life" ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.70$), and the lowest was "Adapt to students' needs" ($M = 1.11$, $SD = 0.32$) For more detailed results see Figure B9 in Appendix B.

Overall mean differences between attitude and belief about the purpose of HE were observed across the *Student* ($M_{diff} = 0.85$, $SD = 0.56$), *Educator* ($M_{diff} = 0.41$, $SD = 0.45$), and *University* dimension ($M_{diff} = 0.49$, $SD = 0.49$). The biggest difference showed the *Student* dimension. Similarly, within students and educators, differences were observed across all three dimensions. *Students* showed again the biggest mean difference for both groups ($M_{diff} = 0.85$, $SD = 0.55$; $M_{diff} = 0.86$, $SD = 0.59$), whereas *University* showed the least difference for educators ($M_{diff} = 0.34$, $SD = 0.54$), and *Educators* was the least for students ($M_{diff} = 0.41$, $SD = 0.45$). See Figure 10B in Appendix B.

Looking at specific items within the *Student* dimension, for students the largest mean difference between attitude and belief was for "Prepare for their career" ($M_{diff} = 1.35$, $SD = 1.56$). The smallest difference was for "Learn critical thinking skills" ($M_{diff} = 0.54$, $SD = 1.04$). For more detailed results see Figure B11 in Appendix B. Regarding *Educator*, the largest difference for students was in the perception that educators should "Learn from students" ($M_{diff} = 1.16$, $SD = 1.35$). The smallest difference was for "Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students" ($M_{diff} = 0.14$, $SD = 0.72$). For more detailed results see Figure B12 in Appendix B. For the *University* dimension, students showed the largest difference in the belief that universities should "Adapt to students' needs (e.g., physical and/or mental disabilities, sudden injury)" ($M_{diff} = 1.48$, $SD = 1.27$). The smallest difference was found for "Make society more productive" ($M_{diff} = 0.36$, $SD = 1.39$). For more detailed results see Figure B13 in Appendix B.

For educators, the largest and smallest differences between attitude and belief about the purpose of higher education were as follows. For the *Student* dimension the largest mean difference was observed in the belief that students should be taught "to think creatively" (M_{diff} = 1.57, *SD* = 1.01). The smallest difference was found in the statement "prioritizing education over other interests" (M_{diff} = 0.26, *SD* = 1.34). For more detailed results see Figure B11 in Appendix B. For the *Educator* dimension, the largest difference was seen in the belief that educators should "learn from students" (M_{diff} = 1.26, *SD* = 1.20). The smallest difference was related to "Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students" (M_{diff} = 0.00, *SD* = 1.23). For more detailed results see Figure B12 in Appendix B. For the *University* dimension the largest difference was in the belief to "Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful" (M_{diff} = 1.77, *SD* = 1.19). The smallest difference was observed in the belief to "Prepare people for jobs most needed in society" (M_{diff} = 0.31, *SD* = 1.47). For more detailed results see Figure B13 in Appendix B.

The overall differences between students and educators in the gap between attitudes and beliefs were largely aligned. Exclusively the *University* dimension showed some difference between students and educators, students displayed a higher difference (M_{diff} = 0.18, $SD_{Students}$ = 0.48, $SD_{Educators}$ = 0.54). The largest difference between students and educators within the *Student* dimension was observed in "Prepare for their career (e.g., make a LinkedIn profile, write professional emails)" (M_{diff} = 0.78, $SD_{Students}$ = 1.10, $SD_{Educators}$ = 1.04) . The smallest difference was observed in "Develop social skills (e.g., communication, empathy)" (M_{diff} = -0.13, $SD_{Students}$ = 1.27, $SD_{Eductators}$ =1.25). The largest difference between students and educators within *Educator* was found in "Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom" (M_{diff} = -0.61, SD = 1.31 and 1.28). The smallest difference was found in "Be an authority figure" (M_{diff} = 0.04, $SD_{Students}$ = 1.12, $SD_{Educators}$ = 1.40). The largest difference between educators and students within *University* was observed in "Make society more

productive" (M_{diff} = 0.98, $SD_{Students}$ = 1.37, $SD_{Educators}$ = 1.31). The smallest difference was observed in "Offer support to students, staff, etc., in times of crisis" (M_{diff} = 0.08, $SD_{Students}$ = 1.17, $SD_{Educators}$ = 1.37). For more detailed results see Figure B11, B12 and B13 in Appendix B.

Hypothesis Analysis

The paired t-test analyses revealed significant differences between the attitude and belief categories when examining all participants' views, including the dimensions *Student, Educator*, and *University*. Conducting additional t-test analyses, tailored to the type of participant (student or educator) and the specific area of interest within HE (*Student, Educator,* and *University*), revealed several noteworthy findings. All areas showed significant mean differences. For instance, both educators' and students' views on *Educator* indicated a significant gap between the attitude and belief categories. All of the results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Paired Samples t-test Results for Perceived Differences Between Attitudes and Beliefs Across the Three Dimensions Among Students and Educators

Group	Dimension	Attitude	SD	Belief	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Students and Educators	Student	3.20	0.44	4.05	0.37	21.82	201	.038*
Students and Educators	Educator	3.33	0.41	3.74	0.37	12.81	201	.038*
Students and Educators	University	3.23	0.38	3.71	0.40	14.08	201	.038*
Students	Student	3.21	0.45	4.06	0.37	20.05	166	.038*

Students	Educator	3.34	0.40	3.74	0.37	11.61	166	.038*
Students	University	3.23	0.38	3.74	0.37	14.02	166	.038*
Educators	Student	3.14	0.39	4.00	0.37	8.54	34	.038*
Educators	Educator	3.30	0.43	3.70	0.40	5.34	34	.038*
Educators	University	3.21	0.40	3.55	0.49	3.75	34	.038*

Note. *N* = 202. CI = 95%, * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. The p-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni correction for 9 tests.

To determine if there were significant differences between the mean differences of participant groups (educators and students), an independent samples t-test analysis was performed. This analysis found no significant differences in the mean levels of opinions between educators and students regarding the attitude and belief measure for *Student*, *Educator*, and *University* within HE. These results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-test Results Comparing Attitude and Belief Differences Across Three Dimensions Between Students and Educators

Dimensions	Students		Educators		F(200)	*p*	Cohen's d
Measures	M	SD	M	SD			
Student	0.85	0.55	0.86	0.59	1.07	.999	.002
Educator	0.41	0.45	0.41	0.45	0.23	.999	.001
University	0.52	0.48	0.34	0.54	0.50	.168	.357

Note. *N* = 202. CI = 95%, * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. The p-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni correction for 3 tests.

We examined which specific statements had alignment and which did not, based on the opinions of educators and students. Most statements examined showed a significant difference between the attitudes and beliefs across all groups. The non-significant items found were "expand personal network" ($t(34) = 2.65$, p < .228), "create a space where everyone's opinions are heard" ($t(34) = 2.76$, p < .190), "instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students" ($t(34) = 0.00$, p < .999), prioritize education over other interests ($t(34) = 2.36$, p < .456), "be an authority figure" ($t(34) = 2.17$, p < .684), "not impose a strong political direction in the classroom" ($t(34) = 0.26$, p < .999), "prepare people for jobs most needed in society" ($t(34) = 1.26$, p = .999), "prioritize educating gifted students" ($t(34) = 2.60$, p < .266), and "make society more productive" ($t(34) = 2.71$, p < .190). See Table A3 and A4 in Appendix A.

Finally, we compared the differences between students and educators regarding the attitude and belief statements. The independent samples t-test analysis revealed that most differences were non-significant across all dimensions. The significant differences were found in "Prepare for their career" ($t = 3.53$, p < .038) and "Make society more productive" ($t = 3.87$, p < .038). Refer to Table A5 in Appendix A for detailed results.

Discussion

Our study aimed to explore the perceived differences between the current role and the ideal role of university education from the perspectives of both students and educators. Specifically, we investigated these perceptions across three dimensions: *Student*, *Educator*, and *University*. This examination provides insights into the alignment and misalignment of expectations within and between these two groups, shedding light on potential areas needing adjustment to align with stakeholders' perspectives in HE. The study revealed significant perceived differences within both students and educators regarding the attitude and belief

about the purpose of HE. Despite these internal differences, the comparison between students and educators showed that their overall perceptions were largely aligned, with most items showing non-significant differences between the two groups. This suggests that both students and educators share similar views on the shortcomings and desired improvements in HE which is stronger than expected, challenging the perceived divide between these groups in previous research (Watty, 2006).

Theoretical Implications

The significant differences within both students and educators indicate a widespread perception that university education is not fully meeting its ideal role. For students, this gap might reflect a desire for more practical and immediate applications of their education, aligning with their career readiness, reflected by the large gap in the statements ´prepare for their career´ and ´Develop professional skills´. For students and educators, the perceived gap might accentuate the desire for fostering humanistic values in HE, indicated by the larger gaps for both groups, such as in "be adaptive to a changing environment", "Develop personal skills", and "Discover their interests". The non-significant differences between students and educators on most items suggest a surprising level of consensus about the shortcomings and desired improvements in HE. This alignment could be leveraged to foster collaborative efforts between students and educators to address these gaps, potentially leading to more effective educational reforms.

One unexpected finding was the low level of agreement on the item "Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful". Both students and educators showed the least agreement on this item. This result was surprising given the contemporary emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility in HE (Chan, 2016). One possible explanation is that participants may perceive this responsibility as primarily belonging to the government or policy makers rather than universities. The

complexity of these issues might also contribute to the belief that universities alone cannot effectively tackle them (Chan, 2016). The agreement in perspectives between students and educators regarding the role of university education was surprising given the literature that portrayed a significant division between these two groups, especially in the context of expectations and perceptions about HE (Chan, 2016; Watty, 2006). One possible explanation for the similarity in beliefs and values between students and educators could be the evolving dynamics within HE, where both face common challenges such as technological advancements, economic pressures, and changing societal expectations (Barnett, 2022; Chan, 2016). This shared environment might foster a more unified perspective on what HE should achieve. Additionally, increased communication and collaboration between students and faculty, driven by modern educational practices and policies promoting inclusivity and engagement, may contribute to a convergence in their views. This alignment suggests a mutual recognition of the need to reform and a collective understanding of the goals and purposes of HE, bridging the gap traditionally perceived between students and educators.

The findings indicate that students and educators emphasize the importance of critical thinking skills and practical career preparation. This finding is consistent with Chan (2016), who highlights that critical thinking is widely valued by both students and institutions as a crucial outcome of HE. Similarly, Watty (2006) discusses the dissonance between current quality measures and ideal educational purposes, suggesting a need for reevaluation of quality indicators to better reflect educational missions that encompass both market demands and intellectual development. The alignment found in our study echoes these calls for a more integrated approach to measuring educational success.

The desire of students to be taught pragmatic skills aligns with findings from the study by Jonbekova (2017), which reveals a strong accentuation on the economic purposes of HE driven by socio-economic pressures. Molesworth et al. (2009) who argue that HE has become

commodified, driven by market forces, prioritizing the acquisition of a degree over the intrinsic educational journey further underpin the economic emphasis. Kezar's (2004) critique of the vocationalization of HE, suggesting it undermines traditional educational missions, is in contrast with the finding that students recognize the importance of practical skills.

Our findings indicate that societal issues are less emphasized as a role of HE, particularly by students. This is evident from the lower agreement on the item "contemplate societal issues". Conversely, Barnett (2022) argues for a broader civic mission for HE, which includes contributing to a democratic society and promoting social responsibility. Barnett (2022) sees the interpenetration of HE with societal needs as an opportunity to embrace these roles more fully, despite increasing marketization and competition. Similarly, Kristjánsson (2017) and Chan (2016) discuss the broader social and civic purposes of HE, such as fostering democratic engagement and social responsibility, which are less emphasized by students and educators.

The findings align with and expand upon existing theoretical frameworks in several ways. Firstly, the responses by students in our study reflect the view that HE should serve both vocational and academic purposes. This dual role is crucial as it prepares students for the job market while also equipping them with critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for broader societal contributions (Barnett, 2004; Haigh & Clifford, 2011; Kristjánsson, 2017). Our study supports Barnett's (2022) argument that HE should foster a culture of lifelong learning and adaptability. By highlighting the significant gaps between the current state of university education and its ideal state, as perceived by both students and educators, our findings accentuate the need for curricula that are not only academically rigorous but also responsive to societal changes. This supports the notion that universities must balance traditional academic goals with the demands of a rapidly changing world (Barnett, 2004; Tight, 2024). Moreover, our findings underscore the importance of integrating

vocational training with academic learning, echoing Peach's (2010) socially critical vocationalism. This integration ensures that graduates are not only job-ready but also possess a critical understanding of societal issues, thereby fulfilling HE's role in developing socially responsible citizens. This dual focus is essential in today's educational landscape, where there is a growing need for graduates who can navigate complex social and professional environments (Peach, 2010; Brooks et al., 2021). Thus, our study enriches the theoretical discourse on the purposes of HE by providing empirical evidence that supports the integration of vocational and academic training, the importance of lifelong learning, and the need for alignment between institutional goals and stakeholder expectations. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how HE can meet contemporary challenges while fulfilling its traditional roles.

Practical Implications

Our study offers several practical applications that can inform educational policies and practices in HE institutions. In light of the pronounced agreement on practical skills by students and critical thinking by students and educators, universities should ensure that the curricula balances theoretical knowledge with practical applications, achieved through experiential learning opportunities such as internships, project-based learning, and real-world problem-solving tasks (Barnett, 2004; Haigh & Clifford, 2011). Additionally, developing interdisciplinary programs that encourage students to think critically across various contexts can further enhance their adaptability and problem-solving skills (Kristjánsson, 2017). Given the significant perceived gap in how well current education prepares students for their careers, institutions should enhance career-related support within their programs by integrating career development courses, workshops on professional skills, and forming partnerships with industries to provide students with hands-on experience and networking opportunities (Peach, 2010). Moreover, the alignment between students' and educators'

perceptions on many aspects of HE suggests that institutions should involve both groups in strategic planning processes to ensure that the goals and policies of the university reflect the needs and expectations of its primary stakeholders, fostering a more collaborative and supportive educational environment (Peach, 2010; Barnett, 2004).

Addressing global rankings and societal contributions is another important aspect. The finding that educators and students perceive the focus on global rankings as excessive suggests university education should increase the university's role in expanding knowledge, fostering innovation, and contributing to societal well-being, rather than solely focusing on metrics that enhance global rankings (Brooks et al., 2021). Institutions should prioritize policies that make them more adaptable and responsive to students' needs by, for example, developing and implementing comprehensive crisis management protocols to provide timely support to students and staff during emergencies, and by regularly collecting and acting on student feedback to continuously improve educational experiences (Barnett, 2004).

Fostering critical thinking and lifelong learning in educational curricula is essential in the perception of educators and students as our study showed. Inspired by Barnett's discussions on critical thinking and flourishing, curricula should be designed to develop students' critical thinking skills and foster a culture of lifelong learning through inquiry-based learning methods and continuous professional development opportunities for both students and educators (Barnett, 2004; Kristjánsson, 2017). Balancing academic freedom with market demands is also crucial. Universities should engage in regular dialogue with industry stakeholders to align academic programs with market needs without compromising academic freedom. This can be achieved by establishing advisory boards with industry leaders, utilizing alumni feedback mechanisms, and conducting periodic curriculum reviews to keep programs relevant while maintaining a focus on intellectual rigor and freedom (Barnett, 2004).

Reevaluating quality assurance practices to reflect both educational substance and transformative potential is necessary. Quality assurance frameworks should go beyond quantitative metrics and incorporate qualitative assessments of educational impact, such as peer reviews, student feedback, and assessments of how well programs develop critical reasoning, creativity, and social responsibility (Watty, 2006). Accreditation bodies should consider these broader educational goals when evaluating institutions (Watty, 2006). Integrating global citizenship and cultural competence into the university curriculum is also important. Institutions should include courses and activities that promote global awareness and cultural competence through study abroad programs, international partnerships, multicultural events, and curricula that include global perspectives and issues (Brooks et al., 2021; Tight, 2024).

By implementing these practical applications and policy recommendations, educational institutions can better align with society's evolving needs and stakeholders' diverse expectations, ensuring that HE fulfills its multifaceted purposes effectively.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of our study is the sample size of educators, which was relatively small. This smaller sample size may not fully represent the broader population of educators, potentially impacting the generalizability of our findings. Consequently, the found perceptions and attitudes from the educators could be distorted, meaning the results should be interpreted with caution, as they may not capture the full spectrum of opinions within this group. Further research with more rigorous designs and larger sample sizes is necessary to validate these findings and explore them in greater depth.

The study's reliance on convenience sampling, primarily involving psychology students who volunteered to participate, presents another limitation. The student's psychology background may have influenced the observed differences between attitudes and beliefs,

which emphasizes humanistic values such as personal development, empathy, and societal contributions more than students from other disciplines (De Robertis, 2013). Consequently, the findings may not accurately represent the broader student population, limiting their generalizability. Pointing to disciplinary background impacting what purpose of HE is valued may be reflected in Watty's (2006) study, which focused on accountant educators and showed a greater emphasis on pragmatic values. Nevertheless, both studies highlight the importance of addressing the gap between current practices and ideal perceptions in HE. Therefore, recognizing and acknowledging the diverse views on educational values and practices is required. University staff and educators hold the primary responsibility for implementing relevant changes, guided by the perspectives of both students and educators (Chan, 2016; Peach, 2010).

The exploratory nature of the study also poses limitations. As an exploratory study, our research was designed to identify potential areas of interest and generate hypotheses for future research rather than provide definitive conclusions. This means that while our findings offer valuable insights into the perceived differences between attitudes and beliefs on the purpose of HE, they should be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive.

Due to the absence of a preexisting philosophical framework, there is uncertainty about whether we accurately measured attitudes and beliefs regarding the purpose of HE. Our thesis team selected philosophical theories on education and crafted the statements based on our rationale and interpretations. This limitation highlights the need for future research to establish a comprehensive philosophical framework for HE, ensuring that measurement tools are systematically developed and validated to accurately capture attitudes and beliefs regarding its purpose.

Golding (2013) emphasizes the need for philosophical inquiry to address normative questions about HE's purpose, which contrasts with our empirical approach to assessing

perceptions and identifying gaps. Future research should integrate philosophical and empirical methods to provide a more holistic view of HE's purpose. Additionally, there is a need for a more disciplined and systematic debate about HE's role, similar to the discussions surrounding primary and secondary education (Barnett, 2022). This would involve engaging various stakeholders, including students, educators, policymakers, and industry leaders, to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in shaping HE policies and practices. To improve the generalizability of findings, future research should aim to replicate our study with larger and more diverse samples, including participants from various academic disciplines and institutions. This would help to capture a broader range of perspectives and provide a more accurate reflection of the views of the entire student and educator populations. Moreover, future studies should investigate the institutional and systemic barriers to curriculum change. Understanding these barriers can inform strategies for effectively implementing the necessary reforms to bridge the gap between the current state and the ideal state of HE.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table A3

Paired Samples t-test Results for Differences between Attitude and Belief

Statements among Students for all Three Dimensions

Dimension	Statement	M_{diff}	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen´s d
Student	Be more adaptive to a changing environment	1.37	1.10	16.11	166	.038*	1.25
Student	Discover their interests	1.28	1.15	14.39	166	.038*	1.11
Student	Develop personal skills	1.13	1.24	11.80	166	.038*	0.91
Student	Develop social skills	0.98	1.27	10.01	166	.038*	0.77
Student	Develop professional skills	0.72	0.96	9.71	166	.038*	0.75
Student	Shape their identity	0.76	1.39	7.10	166	.038*	0.55
Student	Prepare for their career	1.38	1.51	11.85	166	.038*	0.92
Student	Learn critical thinking skills	0.52	1.01	6.58	166	.038*	0.51
Student	Expand personal network	0.66	1.37	6.21	166	.038*	0.48
Student	Develop personal ethics	0.87	1.25	8.95	166	.038*	0.69
Student	Contemplate societal issues	-0.85	1.34	8.21	166	.038*	0.64

Student	Develop professional ethics	0.69	0.96	9.31	166	.038*	0.72
Student	Think creatively	1.35	1.25	13.92	166	.038*	1.08
Student	Cultivate a sense of personal responsibility	0.91	1.21	9.75	166	.038*	0.75
Student	Prioritize education over other interests	1.04	1.48	9.12	166	.038*	0.71
Educator	Create a space where everyone's opinions are heard	1.01	1.08	12.16	166	.038*	0.94
Educator	Create an interactive classroom environment	0.90	1.24	9.44	166	.038*	0.73
Educator	Learn from students	1.14	1.33	11.05	166	.038*	0.86
Educator	Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students	0.17	0.65	3.35	166	.038*	0.26
Educator	Instill applicable knowledge and skills onto their students	0.97	1.00	12.50	166	.038*	0.97
Educator	Teach about societal problems	0.80	1.23	8.37	166	.038*	0.65
Educator	Foster rapports with fellow university personnel	0.49	0.94	6.73	166	.038*	0.52
Educator	Foster rapports	0.68	1.08	8.08	166	.038*	0.63

	with students						
Educator	Prioritize education over other interests	-0.67	1.29	6.67	166	.038*	0.52
Educator	Be an authority figure	-0.48	1.12	5.51	166	.038*	0.43
Educator	Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom	-0.55	1.31	5.43	166	.038*	0.42
University	Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful	-1.41	1.22	15.00	166	.038*	1.16
University	Adapt to students' needs	1.50	1.24	15.65	166	.038*	1.21
University	Prepare people for jobs most needed in society	0.81	1.31	7.99	166	.038*	0.62
University	Share knowledge across different cultural groups	1.04	1.20	11.14	166	.038*	0.86
University	Prioritize educating gifted students	-0.55	1.24	5.74	166	.038*	0.44
University	Expand the knowledge of humankind	0.61	0.83	9.44	166	.038*	0.73
University	Make society more productive	0.38	1.37	3.56	166	.038*	0.28

University	Develop global citizenship through its students	0.50	1.18	5.44	166	.038*	0.42
University	Develop a culture of lifelong learning	0.98	1.25	10.08	166	.038*	0.78
University	Include practical courses that resemble real life in education programs	1.47	1.34	14.22	166	.038*	1.10
University	Improve its status on global rankings	-0.53	1.43	4.76	166	.038*	0.37
University	Offer support to students, staff, etc., in times of crisis	1.42	1.17	15.63	166	.038*	1.21

Note. $N = 202$. CI $= 95\%$, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. The p-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni correction for 38 tests.

Table A4

Paired Samples t-test Results for Differences Between Attitude and Belief Statements Among Educators for all Three Dimensions

Dimension	Statement	M_{diff}	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen´s d
Student	Be more adaptive to a changing environment	1.43	1.04	8.15	34	.038*	1.38

Student	Discover their interests	1.29	1.38	5.50	34	.038*	0.93
Student	Develop personal skills	1.54	1.34	6.83	34	.038*	1.16
Student	Develop social skills	1.11	1.26	5.25	34	.038*	0.89
Student	Develop professional skills	0.57	0.98	3.45	34	.038*	0.58
Student	Shape their identity	1.09	1.52	4.22	34	.038*	0.71
Student	Prepare for their career	0.60	1.12	3.18	34	.076	0.54
Student	Learn critical thinking skills	1.06	0.91	6.91	34	.038*	1.17
Student	Expand personal network	0.34	0.77	2.65	34	.228	0.45
Student	Develop personal ethics	0.91	1.04	5.20	34	.038*	0.88
Student	Contemplate societal issues	-1.00	1.26	4.69	34	.038*	0.79
Student	Develop professional ethics	0.77	1.03	4.43	34	.038*	0.75
Student	Think creatively	1.57	1.01	9.22	34	.038*	1.56
Student	Cultivate a sense of personal responsibility	1.29	1.25	6.08	34	.038*	1.03
Student	Prioritize education over other interests	0.26	1.34	1.14	34	.999	0.19
Educator	Create a space where everyone's opinions are	0.60	1.29	2.76	34	.190	0.47

	heard						
Educator	Create an interactive classroom environment	0.69	1.05	3.86	34	.038*	0.65
Educator	Learn from students	1.26	1.20	6.22	34	.038*	1.05
Educator	Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students	0.00	1.03	0.00	34	.999	0.00
Educator	Instill applicable knowledge and skills onto their students	0.57	0.88	3.82	34	.038*	0.65
Educator	Teach about societal problems	0.89	1.32	3.96	34	.038*	0.67
Educator	Foster rapports with fellow university personnel	0.74	1.12	3.92	34	.038*	0.66
Educator	Foster rapports with students	0.63	0.84	4.41	34	.038*	0.75
Educator	Prioritize education over other interests	-0.46	1.15	2.36	34	.456	0.40
Educator	Be an authority figure	-0.51	1.40	2.17	34	.684	0.37
Educator	Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom	0.06	1.28	0.26	34	.999	0.05
University	Provide a studying	-1.77	1.19	8.80	34	.038*	1.49

	environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful						
University	Adapt to students' needs	1.09	0.89	7.24	34	.038*	1.22
University	Prepare people for jobs most needed in society	0.31	1.47	1.26	34	.999	0.21
University	Share knowledge across different cultural groups	1.34	1.26	6.31	34	.038*	1.07
University	Prioritize educating gifted students	-0.66	1.49	2.60	34	.266	0.44
University	Expand the knowledge of humankind	1.00	0.94	6.30	34	.038*	1.07
University	Make society more productive	-0.60	1.31	2.71	34	.190	0.46
University	Develop global citizenship through its students	1.00	1.19	4.98	34	.038*	0.84
University	Develop a culture of lifelong learning	1.31	1.13	6.87	34	.038*	1.16
University	Include practical courses that resemble real	0.97	1.34	4.29	34	.038*	0.73

	life in education programs						
University	Improve its status on global rankings	-1.23	1.61	4.51	34	.038*	0.76
University	Offer support to students, staff, etc., in times of crisis	1.34	1.37	5.80	34	.038*	0.98

Note. N = 202. CI = 95%, * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. The p-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni correction for 38 tests.

Table A5

Independent t-Test Results Comparing Student and Educator Differences in Attitude-Belief

Statements

Dimension	Statements	M_{diff}	$SD_{Students}$	$SD_{Educators}$	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen´s d
Student	Be more adaptive to a changing environment	-0.06	1.10	1.04	0.283	200	.999	0.05
Student	Discover their interests	-0.004	1.15	1.38	0.02	200	.999	0.01
Student	Develop personal skills	-0.41	1.24	1.34	1.76	200	.999	0.33
Student	Develop social skills	-0.13	1.27	1.25	0.56	200	.999	0.10
Student	Develop professional skills	0.15	0.96	0.98	0.82	200	.999	0.15
Student	Shape their identity	-0.33	1.38	1.52	1.24	200	.999	0.23
Student	Prepare for their career	0.78	1.51	1.12	3.53	200	.038*	0.54

Student	Learn critical thinking skills	-0.54	1.01	0.91	2.93	200	.076	0.55
Student	Expand personal network	0.32	1.37	0.76	1.89	200	.999	0.25
Student	Develop personal ethics	-0.05	1.25	1.04	0.20	200	.999	0.04
Student	Contemplate societal issues	0.15	1.34	1.26	0.61	200	.999	0.11
Student	Develop professional ethics	-0.08	0.96	1.03	0.46	200	.999	0.09
Student	Think creatively	-0.22	1.25	1.01	1.66	200	.999	0.19
Student	Cultivate a sense of personal responsibility	0.78	1.21	1.25	2.90	200	.152	0.31
Student	Prioritize education over other interests	0.41	1.48	1.34	1.99	200	.999	0.54
Educator	Create a space where everyone's opinions are heard	0.22	1.08	1.29	0.97	200	.999	0.37
Educator	Create an interactive classroom environment	-0.12	1.24	1.05	0.49	200	.999	0.18
Educator	Learn from students	0.17	1.33	1.20	0.93	200	.999	0.09
Educator	Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students	0.40	0.65	1.03	2.18	200	.999	0.23
Educator	Instill applicable knowledge and skills onto	-0.09	1.00	0.88	0.39	200	.999	0.41

	their students						
Educator	Teach about societal problems	-0.25	1.23	1.32	1.39	200	.999	0.07
Educator	Foster rapports with fellow university personnel	0.48	0.94	1.12	0.25	200	.999	0.26
Educator	Foster rapports with students	-0.21	1.08	0.84	0.88	200	.999	0.05
Educator	Prioritize education over other interests	0.04	1.29	1.15	0.161	200	.999	0.16
Educator	Be an authority figure	-0.61	1.12	1.40	2.50	200	.266	0.03
Educator	Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom	0.36	1.31	1.28	1.59	200	.999	0.47
University	Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful	0.36	1.22	1.19	1.59	200	.999	0.30
University	Adapt to students' needs	0.42	1.24	0.89	2.34	200	.418	0.35
University	Prepare people for jobs most needed in society	0.49	1.31	1.47	1.99	200	.912	0.37
University	Share knowledge	-0.31	1.20	1.26	1.36	200	.999	0.25

	across different cultural groups							
University	Prioritize educating gifted students	0.11	1.24	1.49	0.44	200	.999	0.08
University	Expand the knowledge of humankind	-0.40	0.83	0.94	2.51	200	.266	0.47
University	Make society more productive	0.98	1.37	1.31	3.87	200	.038*	0.72
University	Develop global citizenship through its students	-0.50	1.18	1.19	2.29	200	.874	0.43
University	Develop a culture of lifelong learning	-0.34	1.25	1.13	1.48	200	.999	0.28
University	Include practical courses that resemble real life in education programs	0.50	1.34	1.34	2.02	200	.874	0.38
University	Improve its status on global rankings	0.70	1.43	1.61	2.58	200	.190	0.48
University	Offer support to students, staff, etc., in times of crisis	0.08	1.17	1.37	0.34	200	.999	0.06

Note. $N = 202$. CI = 95%, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. The p-values were adjusted usingBonferroni correction for 38 tests. the

Appendix B

Figure B1

Combined Average Scores of Students' and Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should")

within the Student Dimension
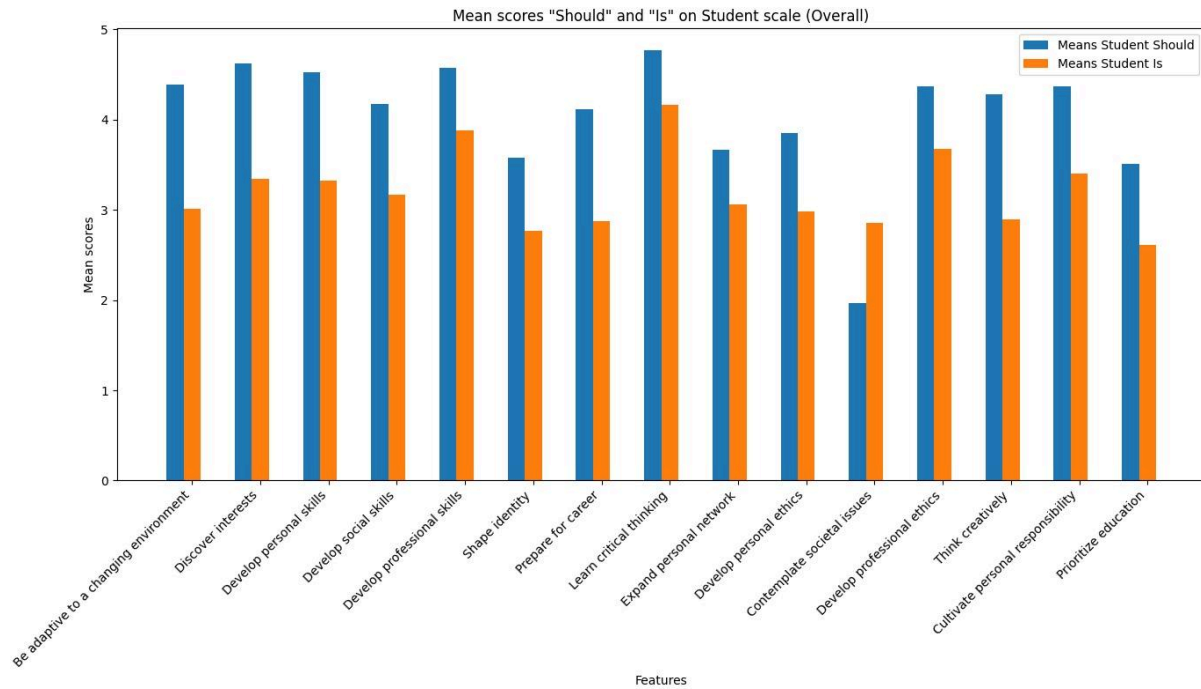
Figure B2

Combined Average Scores of Students' and Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should")
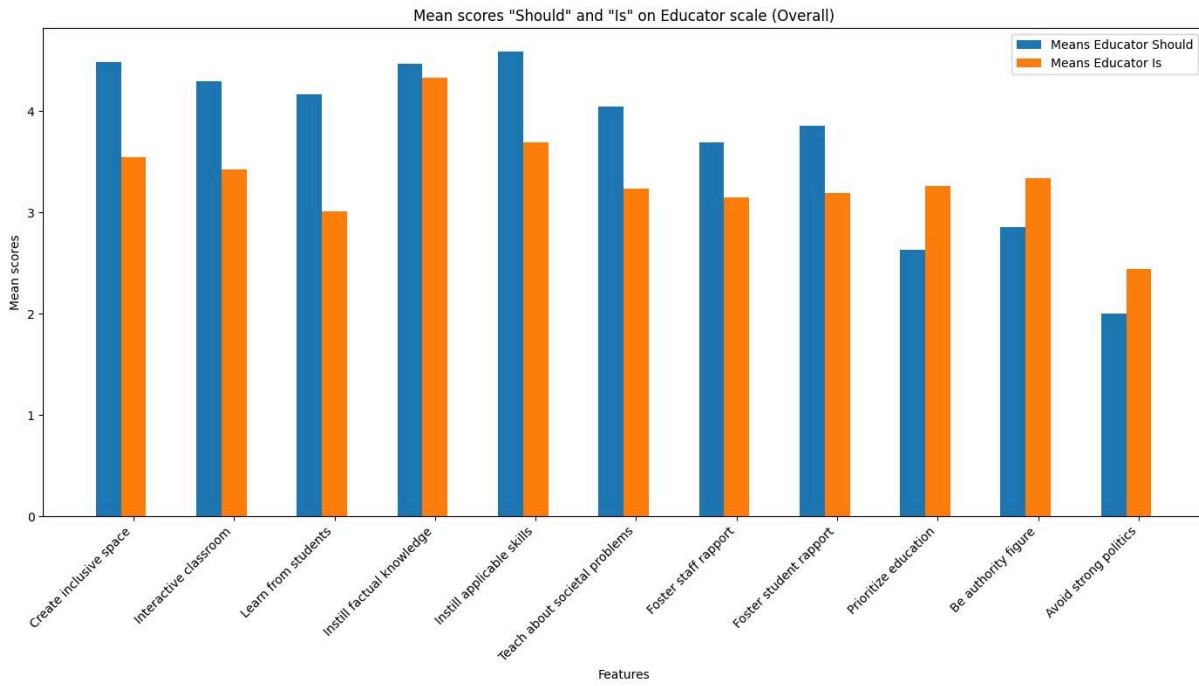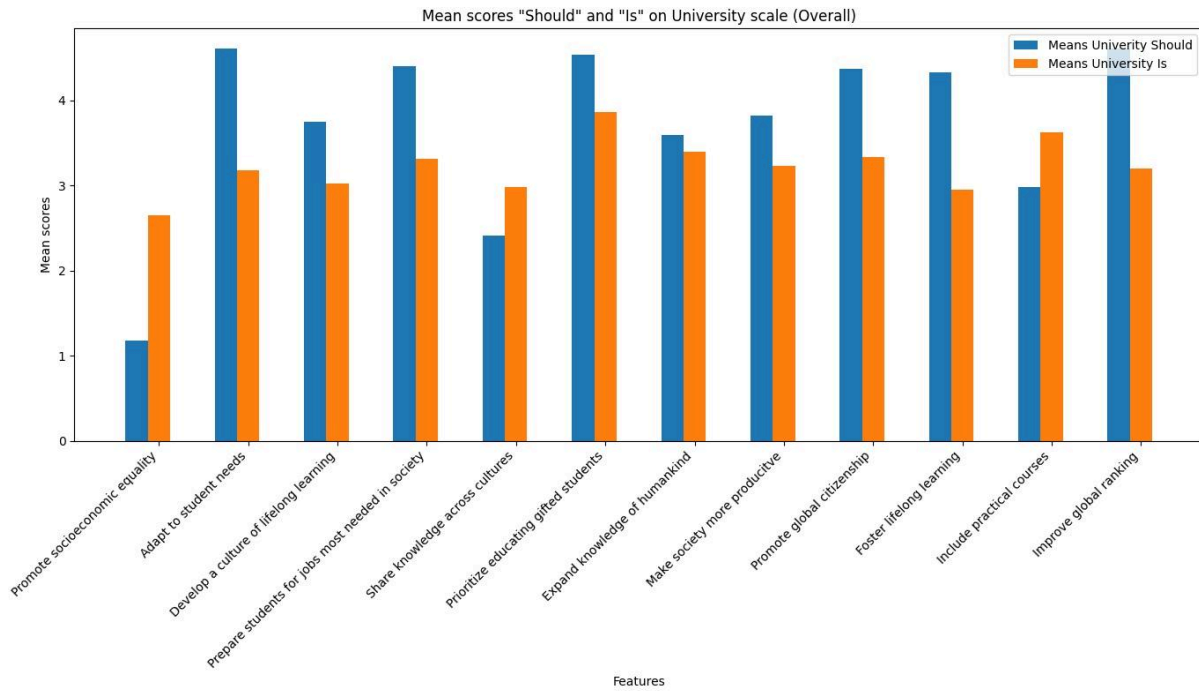
within the Educator Dimension

Mean scores "Should" and "Is" on Educator scale (Overall)

Figure B3

Combined Average Scores of Students' and Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should")

within the University Dimension

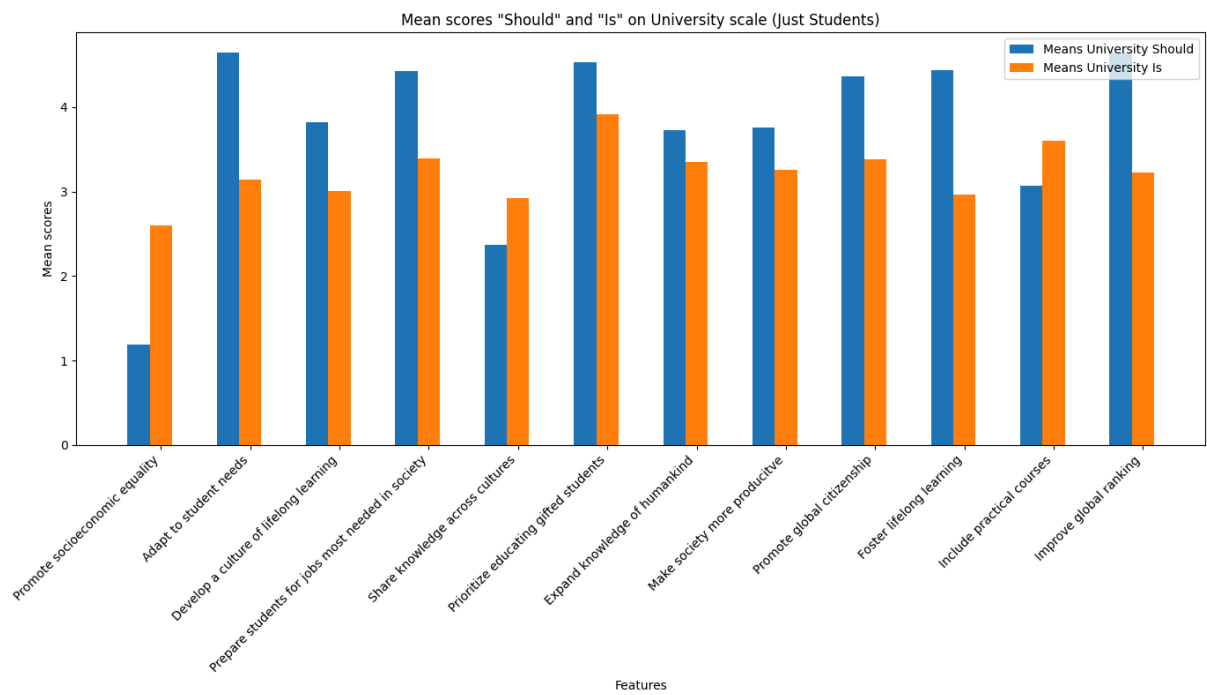Mean scores "Should" and "Is" on University scale (Overall)

Figure B4

Average Scores of Students' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the Student
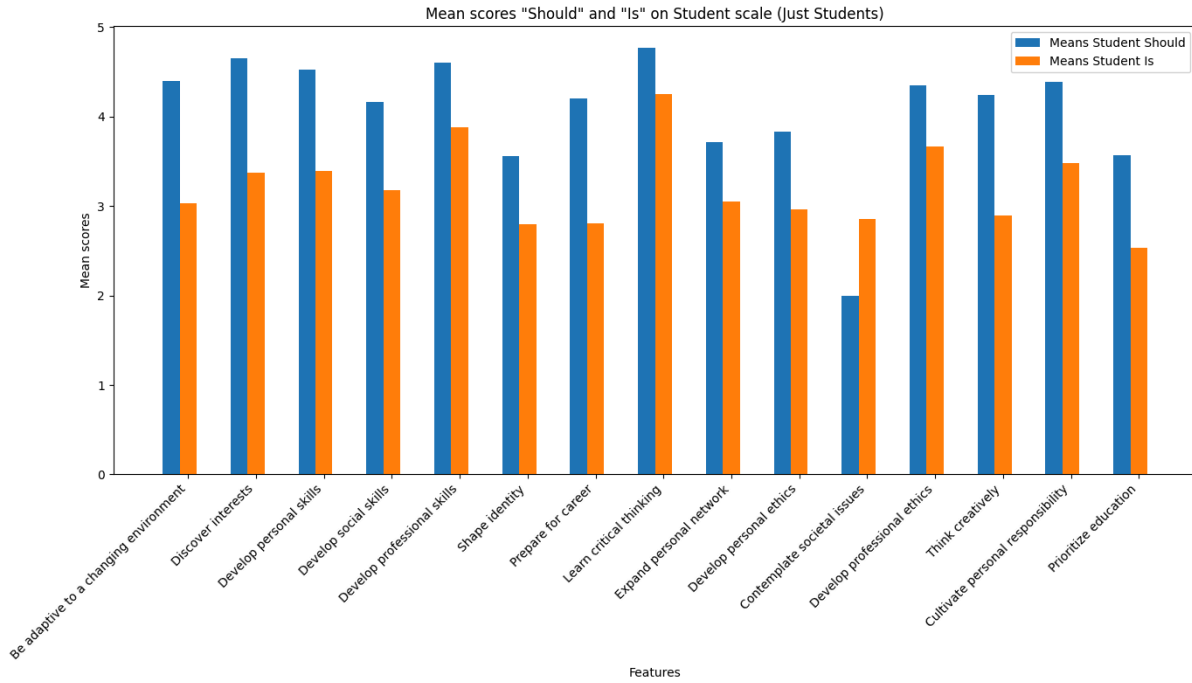
Dimension

Figure B5

Average Scores of Students' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the Educator

Dimension

Mean scores "Should" and "Is" on Educator scale (Just Students)
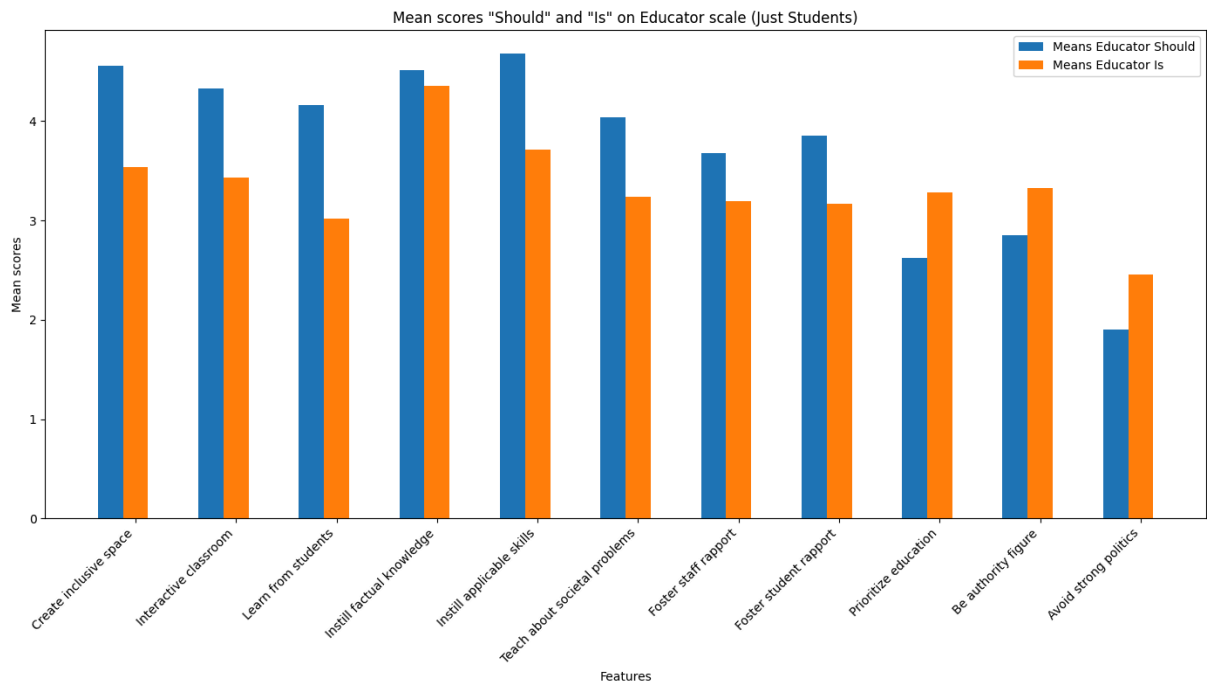
Figure B6

Average Scores of Students' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the University

Dimension

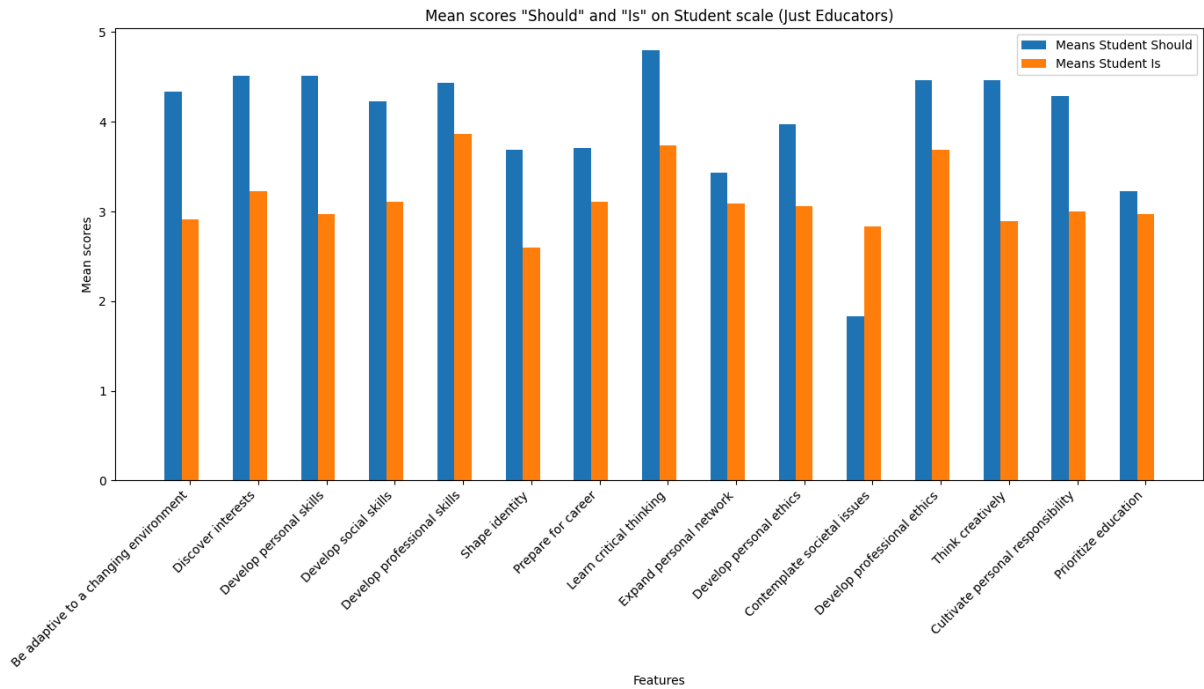Mean scores "Should" and "Is" on University scale (Just Students)

Figure B7

Average Scores of Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the Student

Dimension

Figure B8

Average Scores of Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the Educator
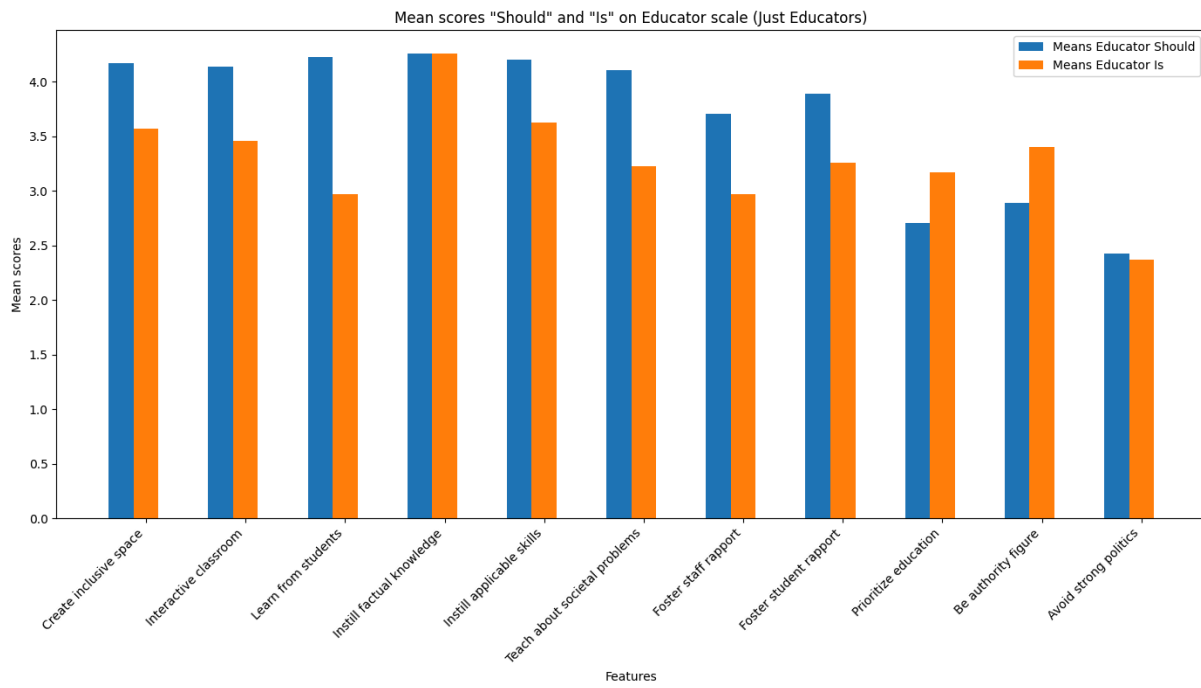
Dimension

Figure B9

Average Scores of Educators' Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") within the Educator
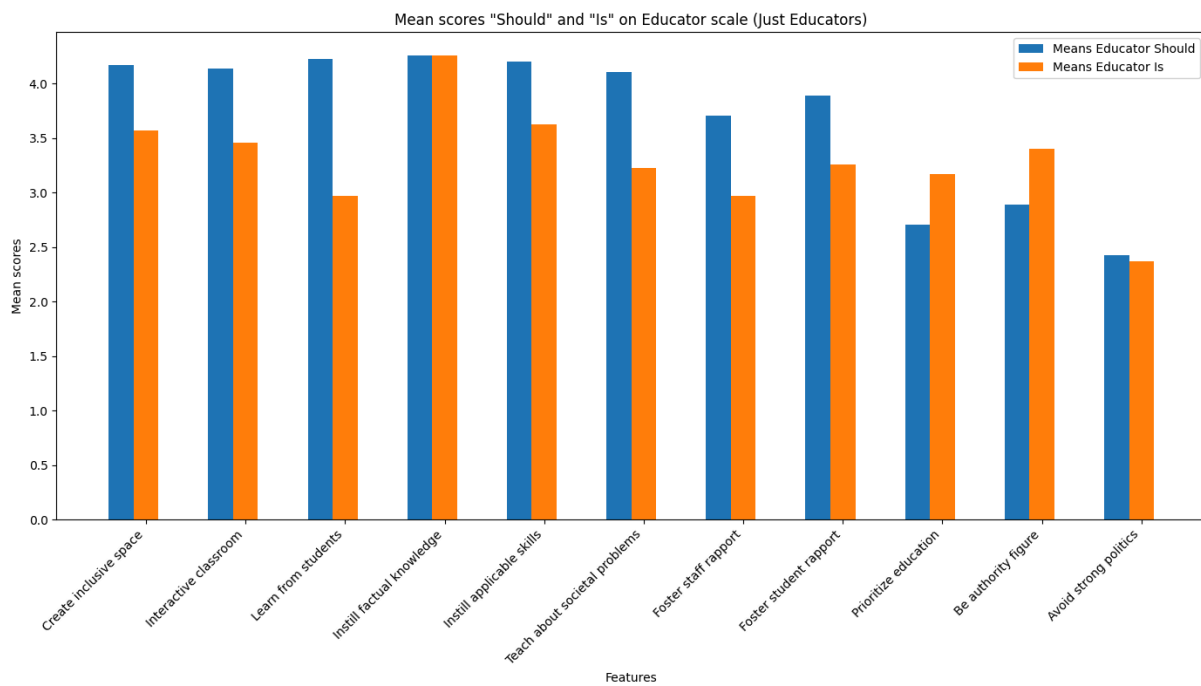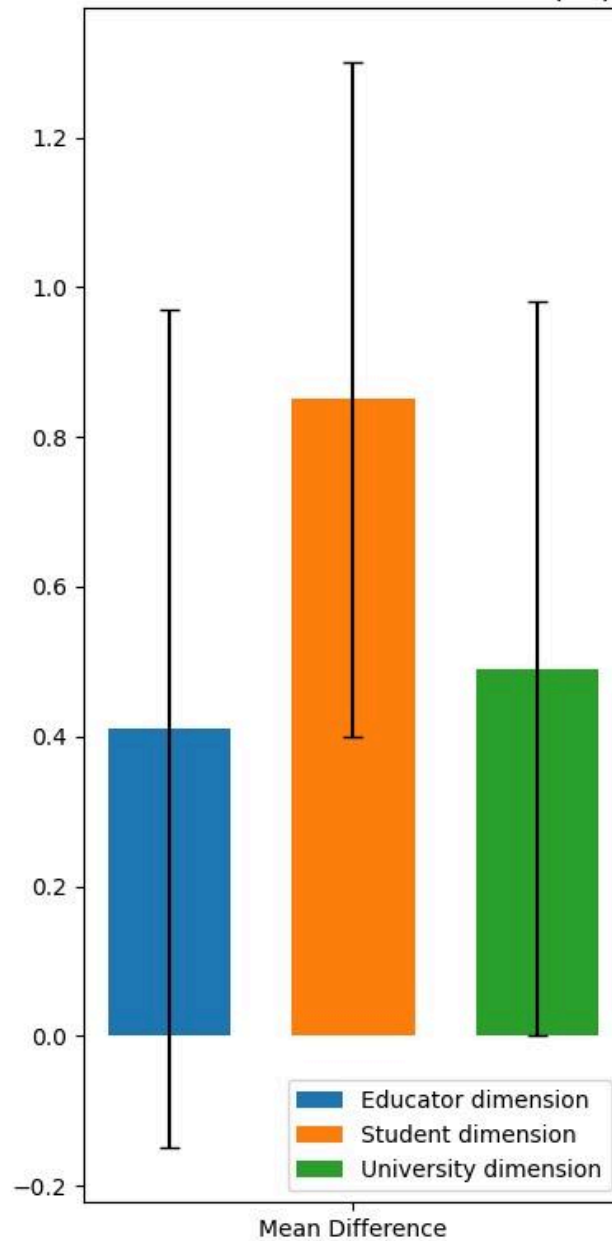
Dimension

Figure B10

Overall mean differences of attitude and belief about the purpose of higher education

Figure B11

Mean Differences in Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") and between Educators and

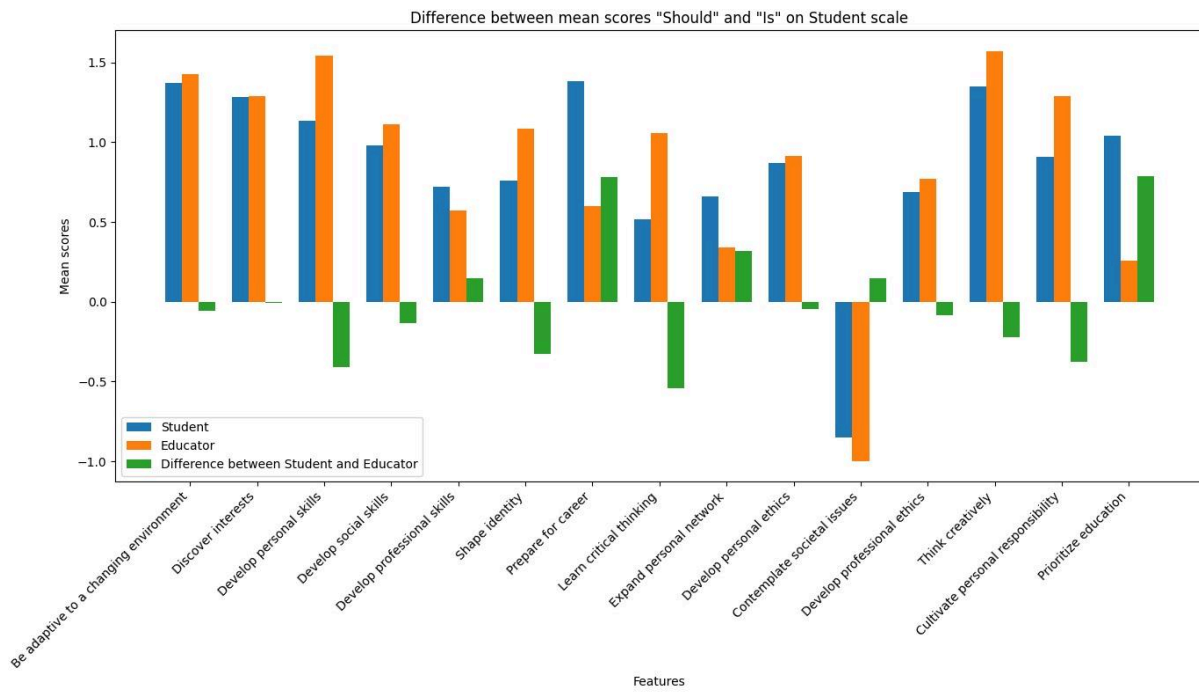*Students within the Student Dimension*

0

Figure B12

Mean Differences in Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") and between Educators and

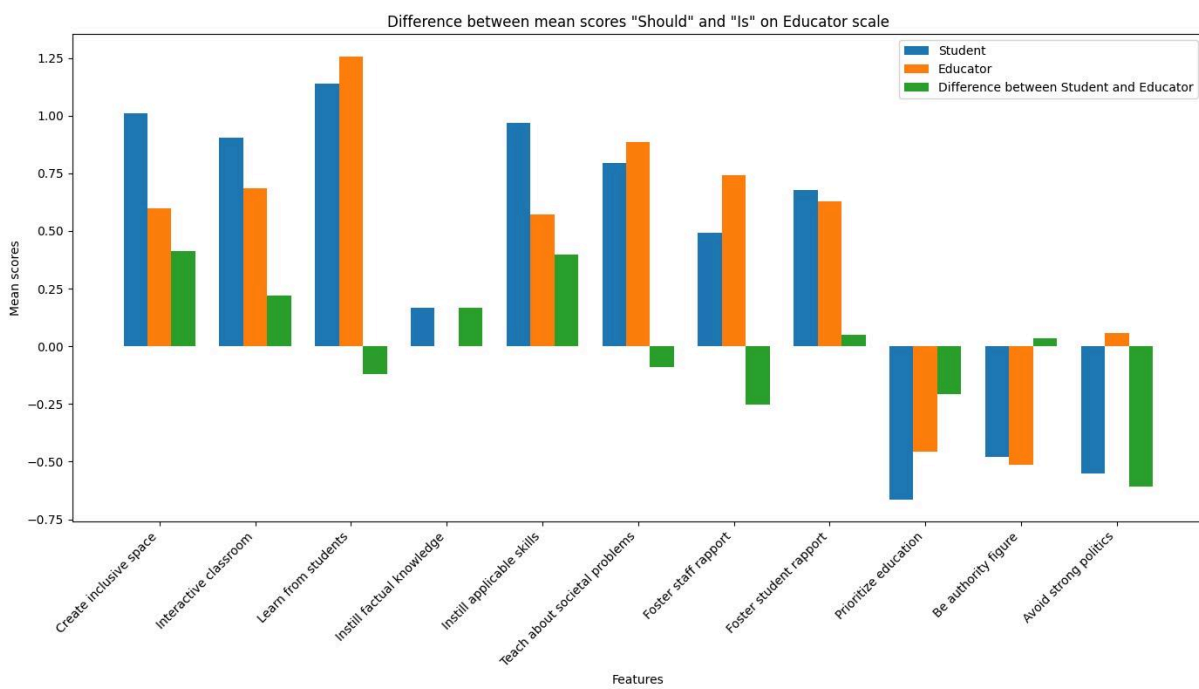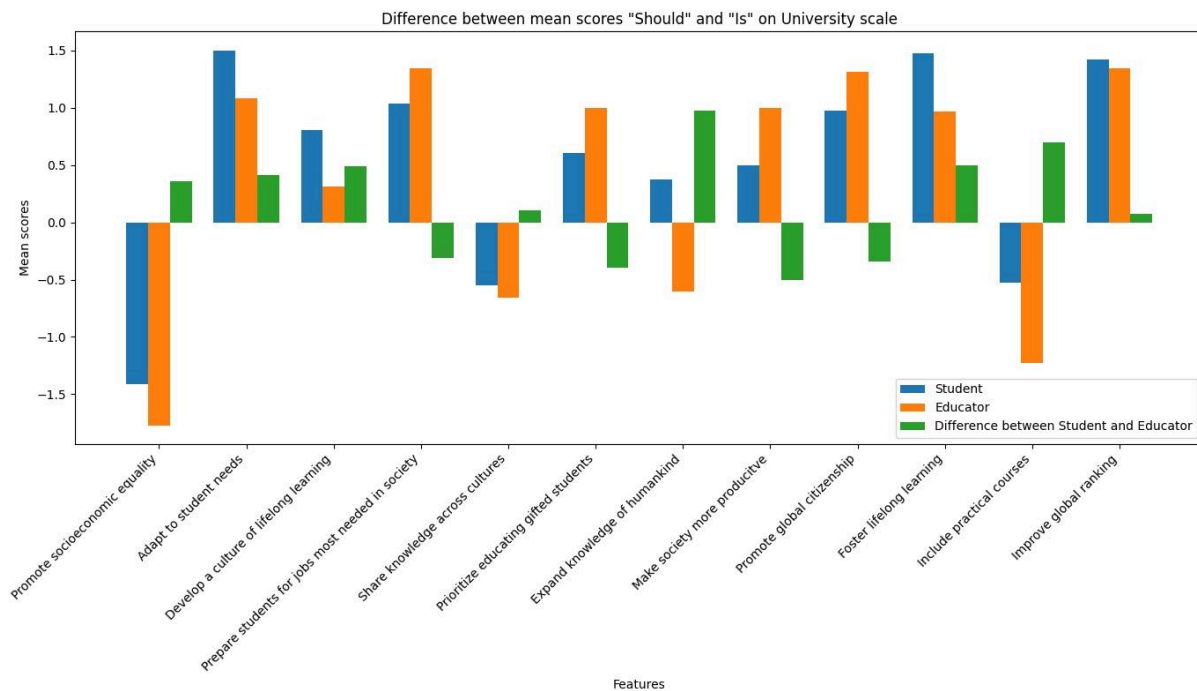*Students within the Educator Dimension*

Figure B13

Mean Differences in Attitudes ("is") and Beliefs ("should") and between Educators and Students within the University Dimension

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey, which is part of our Bachelor thesis project. Our aim is to understand how students and faculty members of the University perceive the purpose of university education. Our focus is on describing these perceptions among students and faculty members, how they may affect interactions between students and faculty along with how they display engagement with university education on a personal level. We will ask you for statements about different viewpoints regarding university education and its purpose. All answers will be collected anonymously and will not be traceable to you as an individual.

Your responses will only be available to our research team. We do not expect this survey to have any negative impact on you, as all we are asking about will be a description of your thoughts towards education. However, we understand that we are currently all living in straining times and we would like you to be aware that you can quit this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable. This will not have any negative consequences for you.

We strongly recommend the use of a laptop or computer for the most comfortable survey-taking experience.

At the end of this survey, you are asked if you want to participate in the lottery, where we will give away five €30 vouchers. Participation in this lottery is completely voluntary. Your contact information will be saved separately from your responses.

Lastly, if there are any questions about your data, our survey, withdrawing from the study or you have any complaints, you are free to send an email to our thesis supervisor: Dr. A. Sarampalis (a.sarampalis@rug.nl)

By agreeing below, you agree to having read this consent form and understood the general idea of this research, to the collection and storage of your data, and that you have been informed of your rights.

Thank you for your time and care in completing this brief survey,

Saran Akhbari

Mats Benninghaus

Eva Brank

Daffa Alfikri Alamsyah

Paulien Kiewiet

Max van der Schoor

o   I consent (1)

o I do not consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = I do not consent

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 4

Q2 What is your primary role in university education?

o Educator (1)

o Student (2)

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 5

Q3 How old are you? (in years)

Q4 What gender do you identify as?

o Male (1)

o Female (2)

o Non-binary (3)

o Other (please specify) (4) _____

o Prefer not to say (5)

Q5 What is your nationality?

o Dutch (1)

o   Other (please specify) (2) _____

Display This Question: If Q2 = Student

Q6 Which level of education do you currently follow?

o   Bachelor (1)

o   Master (2)

o   PhD (3)

o   Already graduated from RUG (4)

o   Other (please specify) (5) _____

Display This Question: If Q2 = Student

Q7 What program do you currently follow?

o   Psychology (1)

o   Sociology (2)

o   Pedagogy and Educational Sciences (3)

o   Other (please specify) (4) _____

Display This Question: If Q2 = Student

Q8 Which year of your study program are you currently in?

o   1st year (1)

o   2nd year (2)

o   3rd year (3)

o   4th year (4)

o   Other (please specify) (5) _____

Display This Question: If Q2 = Educator

Q9 What program do you mainly teach in?

o   Psychology (1)

o   Sociology (2)

o   Pedagogy and Educational Sciences (3)

o   Other (please specify) (4) _____

Display This Question: If Q2 = Educator

Q10 What is your job title at your institution?

o   PhD Student (1)

o   Lecturer (2)

o   Assistant Professor (3)

o   Adjunct Professor (5)

o   Full Professor (6)

o   Other (please specify) (7) _____

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 10

Display this Question: If Q2 = Student

Q11 Rate the following values based on your own reasons for studying at university.

I study to…

	Does not describe me (16)	Describes me slightly well (17)	Describes me moderately well (18)	Describes me very well (19)	Describes me extremely well (20)
Obtain a degree (1)					
Gain knowledge in my field of choice (2)					
Meet the expectations of family and friends (3)					
Postpone starting a professional career (4)					
Develop a social network (5)					
Develop a professional network (6)					
Explore my interests (7)					
Develop my potential as a person (8)					
Improve my job opportunities (9)					

End of Block: Block 10

Start of Block: Block 11

	Does not describe me (11)	Describes me slightly well (12)	Describes me moderately well (13)	Describes me very well (14)	Describes me extremely well (15)
Obtain a degree (1)					
Gain knowledge in					

ones field of choice (2)
Meet the expectations of family and friends (3)
Postpone starting a professional career (4)
Develop a social network (5)
Develop a professional network (6)
Explore ones interests (7)
Develop ones potential as a person (8)
Improve their job opportunities (9)

Q12 Imagine a friend or loved one is at the age when they're considering going to University.

Rate the following values based on what you would advise your friend/loved one to study for.

I would advise my friend/loved one to study to...

Q13 For the next few items we will ask you to rate different statements on a 5-point scale. In all cases, (--) indicates completely disagree, while a (++) indicates completely agree. The midpoint (|) should be selected when your opinion is neutral or if you do not have an opinion at all.

o   I understand (1)

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 14

	Strongly disagree (--) (1)	Disagree (-) (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (|) (3)	Agree (+) (4)	Strongly agree (++) (5)
I have certain life goals that compel me to keep going (1)					
I have overarching goals that guide me in my life (2)					
I have goals in life that are very important to me (3)					

Q14 Firstly, we would like to ask three questions on your personal sense of purpose, in

general

End of Block: Block 14

Start of Block: Block 16

	University students **SHOULD** be taught to					University students **ARE** taught to				
	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)
Be more adaptive to a changing environment (1)										
Discover their interests (2)										

Develop personal skills (e.g., self-awareness, resilience, independence) (3)

Develop social skills (e.g., communication, empathy) (4)

Develop professional skills (e.g., teamwork, planning) (5)

Shape their identity (6)

Prepare for their career (e.g., make a LinkedIn profile, write professional emails) (7)

Learn critical thinking skills (8)

Expand personal network (9)

Develop personal ethics (10)

Contemplate societal issues (11)

Develop professional ethics (12)

Think creatively (13)

Cultivate a sense of personal responsibilit y (e.g., be proactive, accountable) (14)

Prioritize education over other interests (15)

	University educators **SHOULD** aim to					University educators **DO** aim to				
	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)
Create a space where everyone's opinions are heard (1)										
Create an interactive classroom environment (2)										
Learn from students (3)										
Instill factual knowledge and skills onto their students (4)										
Instill applicable knowledge and skills onto their students (5)										
Teach about societal problems (6)										

Foster rapports with fellow university personnel (7)	
Foster rapports with students (8)	
Prioritize education over other interests (9)	
Be an authority figure (10)	
Not impose a strong political direction in the classroom (11)	

Q15 Next, we would like you to state to which degree you disagree or agree with the following statements.

You will see that every statement has two of these 5-point scales to answer: one is to indicate your beliefs on what the purpose of education should be, while the other is to rate how you believe that education currently is.

 The following statements ask about the content of university education.Q16 The following statements ask about the **role of educators within the university**.

Rate to which degree you **disagree** or **agree** with these statements.

End of Block: Block 16

Start of Block: Block 17

Universities **SHOULD** aim to   Universities **DO** aim to

	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)	-- (1)	- (2)	| (3)	+ (4)	++ (5)
Provide a studying environment in which students of various socioeconomic backgrounds can be succesful (1)										
Adapt to students' needs (e.g., physical and/or mental disabilities, sudden injury) (2)										
Prepare people for jobs most needed in society (3)										
Share knowledge across different cultural groups (4)										
Prioritize educating gifted students (5)										
Expand the knowledge of humankind (6)										
Make society more										

productive
(7)

Develop
global
citizenship
through its
students (8)

Develop a
culture of
lifelong
learning (9)

Include
practical
courses that
resemble
real life in
education
programs
(10)

Improve its
status on
global
rankings
(11)

Offer
support to
students,
staff, etc., in
times of
crisis (12)

Q17 The following statements ask about the role of universities within higher education.

Rate to which degree you disagree or agree with these statements.

End of Block: Block 17

Start of Block: Block 18

Display This Question: If Q2 = Student

Q18 What do you estimate your Grade Average to be in your current program?

o   6 or lower (1)

o   6-7 (2)

o   7-8 (3)

o   8-9 (4)

o   9 or higher (5)

o   Prefer not to say/I don't know (6)

Display This Question: If Q2 = Student

	Extremely dissatisfied (1)	Somewhat dissatisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Somewhat satisfied (4)	Extremely satisfied (5)
Satisfaction level (1)					

Q19 Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience as a university student?

End of Block: Block 18

Start of Block: Block 19

Display This Question: If Q2 = Educator

	Extremely dissatisfied (1)	Somewhat disatisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor disatisfied (3)	Somewhat satisfied (4)	Extremely satisfied (5)
Satisfaction level (1)					

Q20 Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience as a university educator?

End of Block: Block 19

Start of Block: Block 20

	1 Not at all true (1)	**2 Hardly true (2)**	**3 Moderately true (3)**	**4 Exactly true (4)**

I always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough (1)	
If someone opposes me, I can find means and ways to get what I want (2)	
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals (3)	
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events (4)	
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations (5)	
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort (6)	
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities (8)	
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions (9)	
If I am in a bind, I can usually think of something to do (10)	

No matter what
comes my way,
I'm usually able to
handle it (11)

Q21 Rate each statement on how well it reflects how you feel about yourself.

End of Block: Block 20

Start of Block: Block 21

Q22 Having answered all of these questions, do you have something to add that pertains to the

purpose of university education (what it should or should not be, what is currently is or is

not)?

End of Block: Block 21

Start of Block: Block 22

Q23 Thank you for your participation in our survey.

Please leave your email address here if you want to enter to win a €30 voucher. Participation

is completely voluntary; your email address will not be connected to the rest of your

responses.

o   No, I would not like to participate (1)

o   Yes, I would like to participate (fill in your email address below) (2)

_____

End of Block: Block 22