Exploring Degrees of Connection: Challenges and Acceptance of the European Degree Label towards Shaping the Future of Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper investigates the adoption and implementation of the European Degree Label (EDL) within joint degree programs, using Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991) as a predictive framework. Specifically, the study examines how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC) influence key stakeholders' intentions and actual behaviours towards EDL adoption. The TPB framework is extended to the context of organizational transformation, highlighting its applicability in navigating resistance to change within educational institutions.

Administered to academic stakeholders across Europe, the questionnaire focuses on three TPB dimensions: attitudes towards the EDL, academic community norms, and stakeholders' self-efficacy and perceived control over EDL implementation. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the study aims to produce nuanced insights into these behavioural predictors. Anticipated results are expected to identify practical strategies for fostering EDL acceptance, including aligning organizational norms with policy objectives and enhancing stakeholders' PBC through leadership support and training, thus fostering cooperation throughout the European Higher Education Area and furthering its fundamental values.

The results presented in this paper are part of a broader project: SMARTT - Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming Higher Education international programmes. SMARTT aims to analyse, test, and pilot the new European Degree label criteria, with the goal of improving the quality and increasing the transferability of future developments of European Degrees across Europe and beyond (SMARTT 2023).

1 Introduction

In the past decades, the European higher education has experienced significant changes, aiming for greater compatibility of educational structures throughout the continent. At the centre of these changes is the Bologna Process, a crucial series of reforms and policies, which culminated in 2010 through establishing a unified European Higher Education Area (EHEA). EHEA is characterized by its recognition of academic qualifications across national borders, facilitating the free movement of students and academics. The EHEA signifies a commitment among European nations to pursue a more cohesive approach to higher education. This approach not only aims at strengthening social bonds and reducing inequalities but also at enhancing economic and cultural collaboration. It is built on shared values and internationalization, encompassing social aspects, as well as the teaching and learning dynamics.

Globalization and internationalization are considered to be the basis from which the process of higher education reform started (Voegtle 2014). On one hand, this context exacerbated competitiveness among higher education institutions, both nationally and internationally, driven by international reputation, outcomes and success rates of students and graduates, financial resources, increased mobility (and implicitly the options of students and faculty) (Heinze and Knill 2008), which contributed to the increase of external pressures that higher education institutions were forced to respond to. On the other hand, it led to increased cooperation, allowing for more mobility, for the development of double, multiple or joint degrees and, more recently, to the creation of University Alliances and to a potential future legal status for European Universities. There has been a growing incentive for representatives of higher education systems at the European and even international level to collaborate towards a convergence objective, which helps higher education institutions remain relevant to the needs of beneficiaries in a globalized educational system, to which the Bologna Process tried to respond (Voegtle 2014).

In the context of these transformations of the educational landscape, the European Degree Label (EDL) recently emerged as a pivotal initiative or as an `European policy experimentation in higher education` initiative (European Commission 2022). The EDL proposes a *seal of quality* for joint degree programs, symbolizing a commitment to excellence in transnational education and enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education globally, building further on the success of the Bologna Process and on the growing potential of the EHEA. However, building on the success of these initiatives also requires an increased awareness of their flaws.

These past 25 years witnessed not only policy changes, but also a shift in national, institutional, and individual behaviour in relation to these changes. While competition and cooperation could both be seen as adaptive processes in the implementation of the Bologna Process and the development of EHEA, a high level of resistance to change was felt throughout, due to either lack of awareness, of trust, of clarity or of resources, perceived threats to traditional practices, un-alignment or conflicting priorities among other factors.

Therefore, while not attempting to alter the inherently stochastic nature of change in higher education, the rationale for this study arises from the need to better understand and address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities presented by the EDL and to provide a predictive framework that could help guide its adoption and implementation.

2 The European Degree Label: A Brief Overview

To address the scope of this paper, this section provides a brief overview of the European Degree Label (EDL), delving into the importance of the EDL in the context of global education and highlighting the critical role of understanding stakeholder perspectives for its effective implementation. As the EDL was initially outlined in the European Strategy for Universities a little over a year (European Commission 2022), there are only a few relevant sources and no specific research on the topic. Thus, references will be made to official documents and to the pilot initiative.

Overall, the EDL is regarded as an essential milestone in achieving the European Education Area, as it aims to foster and enhance transnational cooperation between higher education institutions (HEIs) across Europe and to encourage student mobility. Through a recent call for proposals funded by the European Commission within the Erasmus+ Programme framework (2022), the European Union engaged six alliances of `higher education institutions and national authorities to examine, test, and facilitate the delivery of a joint European Degree Label` (European Commission 2022).

The Label, issued on a voluntary basis, `would reflect the skills and learning outcomes acquired by students` (idem) who participated in joint programmes across multiple institutions and countries. Whilst there is no official definition of the EDL, other than being a *complementary certificate* to the qualifications students receive upon graduating from joint programmes (European Commission 2023), the Label is described through 20 proposed criteria (11 mandatory and 9 optional), which would facilitate the issuing of joint diplomas, degrees and certificates across EHEA (idem). The criteria are based on a common set of European standards. For clarity, we organised these criteria into clusters[1], as follows:

1. Structural: transnational cooperation (higher education institutions involved, joint policies for the joint programme, transnational joint degree delivery, transnational campus – access to services, visibility and awareness).
2. Functional: labour market and employability (graduate outcomes, cooperation with the labour market, internships/work-based learning, career development plan).
3. Qualitative: student-centred teaching and learning (transparency of learning outcomes, quality assurance arrangements, flexible and embedded student mobility, innovative learning approaches, alternative learning formats, digital skills).
4. European values: inclusion and sustainability (multilingualism, inclusiveness and sustainability, language classes, environmental care, democratic values)

(SMARTT 2023)

The EDL could represent a strategic tool in fostering European identity and cooperation in higher education. By endorsing joint programs that encourage collaboration between institutions across different countries, the EDL would further facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices, thereby strengthening the European education space. Additionally, the Label could play a crucial role in enhancing the employability of graduates by providing a recognizable and respected qualification, which is of significant value in an ever-increasingly globalized job market. As the EHEA continues to evolve, the EDL brings another layer of complexity to the process, with its aim to enhance the quality of European higher education systems and to ensure they are adaptable, collaborative, and responsive to the ongoing transformation of the educational system and of society as a whole.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities this transformation presents is crucial for comprehending the broader context of this study. The intended added value of the EDL within the EHEA context is reflected at:

[1] As part of the SMARTT project, indicators were also developed for each criterion, in order to allow for more clarity and measurability. The final list of proposed indicators will be finalised and published at the end of the project (April 2024).

- individual level, as it aims to enhance academic and professional mobility for students and academics, enabling individuals to pursue opportunities abroad and build international careers and ensuring their European degrees are recognized and valued globally.
- Institutional level, by acting as a catalyst for adopting globally oriented curricula and teaching methods and improving the quality of education offered; similarly, collaboration among HEIs can lead to innovative educational practices and research partnerships.
- National level, contributing to maintain and increase the standard of education by providing a unified benchmark, as it bridges the variations in educational standards and qualifications that exist across different countries.
- European level, by strengthening the attractiveness and trustworthiness of European degrees, making them more appealing to both international students and employers.
- International level, by fostering international collaboration and cultural exchange, facilitating the international recognition of degrees, and by playing a crucial role in economic development.

The adoption and implementation of the EDL also faces several challenges, starting from resource allocation – both in terms of finance and human capital, to the highly diverse higher education system, which brings up the issue of standardization in quality assurance and recognition mechanisms, as well as in relation to HEIs' autonomy. While attempting to further contribute to the harmonization of educational standards, the EDL's stated purpose is that of providing a complementary solution that could enhance transnational cooperation while respecting institutional autonomy (European Commission 2023). This represents perhaps the biggest challenge, as the implementation of the EDL must also reconcile a number of different perspectives. The successful adoption and implementation of the EDL is therefore dependent on the acceptance of various stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, students, and employers. Acceptance is dependent on the willingness and ability of educational institutions to align their programs with the EDL criteria and the policymakers' better understanding of how it aligns with national objectives. Moreover, students, as primary beneficiaries, need to be convinced of its added value to their educational and professional future, while employers' recognition is crucial for the employability of graduates.

Given all these different perspectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and factors influencing the adoption and acceptance of the EDL.

3 Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour and Organisational Change

To provide this understanding, the study uses Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a theoretical framework. The TPB provides the context for understanding the relationship between attitudes, intentions and behaviours and their influence on stakeholders' acceptance and behaviour.

The TPB has been used to predict and explain human behaviour and it asserts that the likelihood of someone engaging behaviour is determined by their intention and it is influenced by factors such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 1991).

In this context, attitudes (AT) refer to a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of a behaviour (idem), as positive attitudes towards change are associated with higher acceptance and commitment (Armenakis et al. 1993). Kotter (1995) indicates that effective change management requires changing attitudes, which can be influenced by several factors, including perceived benefits, trust in leadership, and individual's tolerance for change (Oreg 2003). A second factor, subjective norms (SN), refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not a behaviour (Ajzen 1991). This can be understood, for example, as the influence of peer opinions, of institutional culture, or of the broader academic

community, which connects it to the social learning theory, which reinforces the impact of modelling and observational learning in organizational settings (Bandura 1986). Finally, the perceived behavioural control (PBC) reflects the perception of the easiness or difficulty of performing the behaviour, a concept similar to self-efficacy (Ajzen 1991). If stakeholders perceive that they have the resources, skills, and autonomy needed, they are more likely to engage positively with the initiative, thus the PBC has a determining role in the success of change (Bandura 1977; Ajzen 1991).

In more recent years, its applications range from public health and political science, to communication (Buhmann and Brønn 2018), social media in education (Ursavaş 2022), energy consumption (Canova and Manganelli 2020), risky behaviour (Caputo 2020), or theoretical developments of the model (La Barbera and Ajzen 2020a, 2020b; Willis et al. 2020; Ajzen 2012), among others. According to a systematic review, the TPB has been mentioned in more than 4200 papers in the Web of Science database (Bosnjak et al. 2020).

When it comes to organisational change in higher education, based on the experience of implementing the Bologna Process and on the complexity of the higher education system, resistance to change appears to be particularly challenging. Some of the factors influencing this resistance to change could be identified, for example, in cultural inertia (Kezar and Eckel 2002). Another factor could be the fear of the unknown (Kotter and Schlesinger 1979), as change brings uncertainty. Apart from these, there might also be a lack of involvement (Coburn 2005), as resistance can also arise when stakeholders feel excluded from the decision-making process. Perceived threats (Piderit 2000) could also contribute to resistance, as change may be perceived as threatening to the status quo, particularly in terms of job security, power dynamics, and institutional identity. Last, but not least, resistance could come from resource constraints (Fullan 2007).

Mitigation measures could be adopted, particularly when it comes to leadership and policy. Such measures include, but are not limited to resource allocation, as leaders need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the successful implementation of new initiatives, including financial resources, training, and support systems (Cohen and Kisker 2010). This should also be doubled by vision and leaders who articulate a clear and compelling direction for the future and are able to inspire and motivate stakeholders to embrace new initiatives (Kotter 1996). The decision-making process should also be inclusive (i.e. open communication, collaborative planning, and considering the concerns and suggestions of all parties), as involving a broad range of stakeholders in the change process can enhance buy-in and reduce resistance (Kezar 2001). Along with leadership, policies should align with institutional goals and values to be effective, which helps in gaining support from stakeholders who see the change as beneficial and in line with the institution's mission (Gornitzka et al. 2005).

Understanding organizational change is vital for comprehending the complexities involved in implementing and sustaining initiatives such as the EDL. It also offers a compelling argument for investigating how attitudes (AT), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC) influence key stakeholders' intentions and actual behaviours towards EDL adoption.

4 Methodology

The methodology of this study aims to explore the challenges and acceptance of the European Degree Label (EDL). To achieve this, a mixed-method approach is employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. This section outlines the rationale for this approach.

The study is based on the research conducted through the SMARTT project: `Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming Higher Education international programmes`, funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme. The overall objective of the project is to analyse the EDL and provide recommendations on its development and implementation. The project was carried out from April 2023 to March 2024 and it consisted of two main stages: a pre-testing phase, validating the EDL criteria against EUROSUD – an international master programme in South European Studies and a second phase, which entailed replicating the pre-test at CIVIS level (a European Alliance comprising 11 European HEIs and 6 partner HEIs in Africa), including the project partner Alliances: EUTOPIA, NeurotechEU and UNITA. The overall study used a mixed methodology, comprising of documents' analysis, workshops, interviews, and focus-groups with relevant stakeholders, as well as two surveys – one mapping the EDL criteria against the double, multiple and joint degree programmes participating in the project and the second one investigating the EDL from the programmes' perspective.

For the purpose of this paper, the methodological approach will involve one quantitative survey to gauge the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control of program coordinators towards the EDL.

4.1 Survey structure

The survey in its entirety consists of fifty-four questions that offer multiple answers on a scale of five points, along with ten questions that are open-ended. The initial twelve questions, as well as the last two, cover general topics. Meanwhile, twenty-five questions are specifically designed to evaluate the participants' opinions about the EDL, based on seven pre-established meta-criteria: clarity, relevance, specificity, measurability, flexibility, readiness, and consistency. Within the survey, there are twenty-six multiple-answer questions that relate to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) framework, distributed as follows: six questions about Attitude (AT), six about Subjective Norms (SN), nine about Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), and five about Utilization Intention (UI). This paper will exclusively analyse these twenty-six TPB-related questions as the focus is on the AT, SN and PBC and their relationship with UI, underpinned by statistical analysis. Additionally, relevant insights from other survey questions are selectively incorporated based on their pertinence to the topic.

4.2 Sample

The survey was administered from December 2023 to February 2024 to representatives (academic and administrative staff) of ninety-five double, multiple and joint programmes from fourteen HEIs part of CIVIS and from the project's partner alliances, selected through an initial mapping of the CIVIS and partners' programmes based on the EDL criteria.

The questionnaire yielded sixty-four responses. Of these, fifty-two were deemed complete and subsequently incorporated into the final dataset for analysis. The results are based on responses from ten European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the UK), reflecting the perspective of twenty-six coordinating universities and of fifty programmes, comprising more than one hundred partner universities from all across the world.

The survey was distributed electronically using SoSci Survey[2], a platform that ensures data privacy and ease of access for respondents. In conducting this research, ethical considerations were addressed, such as informed consent, confidentiality, data protection and voluntary participation. Several follow-

[2] https://www.soscisurvey.de/

up meetings were also set, allowing for a debriefing to be provided to inform participants about the findings and contributions.

5 Results

While acknowledging the limitations of a non-representative sample, statistical methodology was employed to identify potential correlations and explore inferential possibilities within the dataset. In addition to quantitative analysis, open-ended questions were also examined to provide qualitative context and depth, enriching the understanding of the numerical data.

In an effort to understand the factors influencing the intention to use the European Degree Label (EDL), we employed a linear regression model, operationalizing the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by examining the roles of attitudes (AT), perceived behavioural control (PBC), and subjective norms (SN). The model was estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, with the intention to use the EDL as the dependent variable and attitudes, control, and norms as independent variables. The specified model is intention ~ attitudes + control + norms.

The analysis revealed that the model significantly predicts the intention to use the European Degree Label, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in intentions ($R^2 = 0.72$, $F(3, 35) = 30.27$, $p < .001$).

Table 1 - *Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals for the TPB variables (in EDL context)*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Attitudes Toward Adoption	4.26	0.99			
2. Perceived Behavioural Control	3.63	0.96	.68** [.47, .81]		
3. Subjective Norms	3.75	0.94	.63** [.40, .78]	.66** [.44, .80]	
4. Intention of Use	3.90	1.12	.74** [.56, .86]	.71** [.51, .84]	.67** [.45, .81]

Note. M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Response range is: 1 – 5. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

The effects of the TPB components on intention were as follows:
Attitudes: There is a significant and positive relationship between attitudes towards the European Degree Label and the intention to use it (beta = 0.34, 95% CI [0.08, 0.60], $t(35) = 2.65$, $p = 0.012$). The standardized beta coefficient (Std. beta = 0.34) confirms the strength of this relationship, indicating that more favourable attitudes are associated with stronger intentions to use the Label.

Perceived Behavioural Control: Similarly, perceived control over using the European Degree Label shows a significant and positive effect on intention (beta = 0.52, 95% CI [0.22, 0.83], t(35) = 3.51, p = 0.001). The standardized beta (Std. beta = 0.46) underscores the importance of perceived control, suggesting that individuals who feel more capable of using the label are more likely to intend to do so. **Subjective Norms**: The influence of subjective norms on intention, while positive, did not reach statistical significance (beta = 0.17, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.44], t(35) = 1.30, p = 0.204). The standardized beta (Std. beta = 0.16) suggests a modest, non-significant trend. The effect of subjective norms may be more nuanced and could also be influenced by other variables.

Table 2 - *Prediction of the intention of EDL use with the TPB components.*

Predictor	*b*	*b* 95% CI [LL, UL]	*beta*	*beta* 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	*r*	Fit
(Intercept)	-0.04	[-0.92, 0.84]						
Attitudes	0.34*	[0.08, 0.60]	0.34	[0.08, 0.59]	.06	[-.03, .14]	.74**	
Control	0.52**	[0.22, 0.83]	0.46	[0.19, 0.73]	.10	[-.01, .21]	.79**	
Subjective Norms	0.17	[-0.10, 0.44]	0.16	[-0.09, 0.41]	.01	[-.03, .05]	.67**	
								R^2 = .722**
								95% CI[.51,.80]

Note. A significant *b*-weight indicates the beta-weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *beta* indicates the standardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *r* represents the zero-order correlation. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

To sum up, the correlation coefficients for AT and PBC underline strong positive relationships, reinforcing the idea that both favourable attitudes and higher perceived control are intricately linked to a higher intention or actual adoption of the behaviour (namely intention to use the EDL), both being consistent with the TPB. The implications of these results could suggest that these are the two components which should be particularly addressed in relation to the EDL implementation. On the other hand, while it seems that social influence is relevant, it may not be as strong a predictor in this context, as the measure of subjective norms may not fully capture the construct, or its effect could be moderated by other variables not included in the model. This is a point of interest and could be explored further in subsequent research. In terms of limitations, while the high R^2 value indicates the model is robust in this context, the components of TPB may have different weights and interactions which have not been accounted for in this current paper.

The open-ended questions included in the questionnaire also help bring some nuance to the results presented above. The survey contains responses to open-ended questions related to various aspects of the educational or organizational context, specifically focusing on the need for adaptation, impact assessment, best practices, feedback, relevance, and alignment of the EDL criteria with the existing programmes. By analysing these open-ended questions through the lens of TPB, we aimed to better understand the factors which influence individual or organisational behaviour in adapting or implementing new practices, such as the EDL. Hence, we have labelled responses to the open-ended questions as follows: attitudes towards change (AT), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC), in order to reflect the TBP components previously analysed.

When it comes to **attitudes towards change** (including perceived benefits and challenges), positive attitudes are reflected in responses that highlight the need for adaptation or suggest the recognition of the benefits associated with change. Different themes have been highlighted in positive terms, such as: increased international recognition and quality assurance, increased student mobility and collaborative opportunities as well as an overall better alignment with global trends. For example, there are mentions of "internationality, recognition at European level" and "obtaining different degrees on a joint program", which can be seen as positive attitudes towards enhancing the educational offer and its appeal. Moreover, there are several responses providing descriptions of key strengths, like "democratic values, multilingualism, student mobility," which reflect a positive evaluation of current practices and the potential benefits of further promoting these values. Some responses point to perceived challenges or **negative aspects** related to change, such as the need for "financial support to coordinate the program" and concerns about "resources at our Faculty." The primary challenges identified include bureaucratic hurdles, procedural complexity, limited resources, cultural and structural resistance, diversity and inclusivity issues, and concerns regarding autonomy. These highlight apprehensions about the feasibility and potential drawbacks of implementing changes related to the EDL.

In terms of **subjective norms,** we have considered feedback on the EDL and potential indicators of social/organizational pressure. There is a rather high rate of non-response (or negative answers) for the open-ended questions, which indicates a relatively low engagement with the topic of the EDL. One of the suggested best-practices for the implementation of the EDL was the existence of "administrative support teams", which indicates some level of social support for managing adaptations, implying that where such support is present, there may be a normative push towards adaptation.

In relation to the **perceived behavioural control**, we focused on labelling *resources, support,* and *obstacles.* The main facilitating factors appear to be related to the existence of "clear guidance" and examples of effective practices. Obstacles directly related to this dimension are identified as "resources (economic and personal), administrative workload", while recommendations for improvement focus on "financial support and hiring personal", underscoring the necessity of external resources for perceived behavioural control.

Overall, most respondents do not perceive any conflict between the EDL criteria and existing quality assurance frameworks or standards in their programme. Some respondents highlight financial and managerial needs, point out specific conflicts with local regulations, the need for multilingual criteria, or the challenges of harmonizing across different academic cultures, while others stress out potential risks: "there might be a risk of micro-management and disregard of local structures for organization and quality assurance".

The open-ended questions' analysis reflects overall a mix of attitudes, ranging from positive outlooks on the benefits of implementing the EDL, to concerns about the anticipated obstacles and the actual feasibility of this process.

6 Discussion

In summary, the study found that positive attitudes towards the EDL and perceived behavioural control are significant predictors of the intention to use the EDL, with perceived behavioural control being a stronger predictor of the two. Subjective norms showed a positive but not significant relationship with intention, indicating that social pressures or expectations might not play as crucial a role in this context, or their effect could be more complex and influenced by other variables not examined in this study.

The qualitative analysis highlights both positive attitudes towards the EDL, such as the recognition of its benefits for international recognition and enhancing the educational offer, and concerns about challenges, particularly regarding financial and resource constraints. The analysis indicates a relatively low engagement with the EDL topic, as suggested by a high rate of non-response to open-ended questions. However, results indicate that organizational support could play a role in encouraging the adoption of the EDL. Facilitators and barriers reflect concerns about resources and administrative support as critical to implementing the EDL.

In terms of **limitations**, the sample used for this study might not be representative for the whole EHEA, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings, which could affect its applicability to different contexts. Moreover, the study's cross-sectional design captures the investigated dimensions at a single point in time, which limits its ability to infer causality or provide a better understanding of how these factors may change over time, as more information on EDL becomes available. Also, the study relies on self-reported measures of the investigated dimensions leading to a certain level of bias, as respondents might overestimate their positive attitudes due to the perceived social value of the EDL. Nevertheless, by using the TPB framework, the study might leave aside other relevant factors or variables not included in the model, but that could have a significant influence on the adoption and implementation of the EDL.

Future research could address these current limitations and explore a broader geographical scope, comparative studies or an impact analysis (following the EDL adoption), employ longitudinal designs, broaden the scope of investigated factors, use more diverse samples, or develop more nuanced measures of subjective norms to overcome the limitations and enhance our understanding of the factors influencing the adoption of initiatives such as the European Degree Label.

However, considering these limitations, some **recommendations** could still be formulated based on the current findings. For **individuals**, specific measures could be taken to support their increased awareness of the EDL and develop a more positive attitude, through participation in formal and informal presentation sessions, participation in training to develop skills for the effective use of the EDL, engagement in peer discussions and through fostering a community of practice supporting the EDL implementation, while avoiding additional administrative burdens. At the **organisational level**, it could be recommended that support structures are put in place, by establishing dedicated administrative support teams to assist with the EDL processes and by allocating resources (both financial and human resources) to address the obstacles identified by the respondents. Nevertheless, results indicate it is important to promote an organisational culture aligned with EDL, thus reinforcing positive attitudes towards it.

Another set of recommendations could refer to **policies** at national and European level that would provide financial support or incentives for institutions seeking to implement the EDL, reducing the barrier of financial constraints. Simplifying the application process to lower perceived behavioural control barriers would make it more accessible to a wider range of institutions. Facilitating knowledge

exchange platforms where institutions can share best practices and lessons learned regarding the EDL would also benefit the process.

In **practice**, building on the findings of this paper, the focus should mainly be on developing the attitudes (AT) and perceived behavioural control (PBC), as results indicate these components as positive predictors of the intention to use the EDL. While subjective norms (SN) were not a significant predictor in this context, efforts to build a stronger community of practice around the EDL could indirectly influence intentions by creating a normative expectation of participation and excellence in international education standards. The norms can manifest in various dimensions, including attitudes towards internationalization, the balance between tradition and innovation, the interplay of collaboration and competition, peer influence, and address the role of leadership. Normative pressures within the academic community could also be tackled by addressing the compliance with perceived standards, the desire to enhance institutional image and prestige, potential funding and resource allocation, responding to stakeholder expectations and the level of internal consensus and alignment.

While not intending to generalize the findings, the study could be further developed by addressing its limitations. These recommendations could serve as initial guidance for policymakers, educators, and institutions as they continue to reshape the future of higher education in Europe and beyond.

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