Understanding teacher agency in universities: why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

Kusters, M.C.J.

Understanding Teacher Agency in Universities:

Why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

Max Kusters

Understanding Teacher Agency in Universities:

Why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

ICLON, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching

ico

The research was carried out in the context of the *Dutch Interuniversity Center for Educational Sciences.*

Title: Understanding teacher agency in universities: Why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

Titel: Inzicht in teacher agency in universiteiten: Waarom en hoe docenten vormgeven aan en omgaan met de universitaire onderwijspraktijk

ICLON PhD Dissertation Series

Print:	Mostert & Van Onderen!
Cover design:	Christine van der Ven
Lay-out:	Christine van der Ven
ISBN/EAN:	978-94-90383-49-7

Understanding teacher agency in universities: Why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,

volgens besluit van het college voor promoties

te verdedigen op 3 juli 2025

klokke 13.00 uur

door

Max Cornelis Johannes Kusters

geboren te Waalre

in 1992

Promotores

Prof.dr. W.F. Admiraal

Prof.dr. R.M. Van der Rijst

Copromotor

Dr. A.J. De Vetten

Promotiecommissie

Prof.dr. B.A. Barendregt (Decaan Graduate School / voorzitter)

Prof.dr.ir. F.J.J.M. Janssen

Dr. E.H. Tigelaar

Dr. M.O. De Jonge

Prof.dr. M.L.L. Volman, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Prof.dr. J. Schoonenboom, Universiteit van Wenen

Contents

Chapter 1 – General Introduction 7

Chapter 2 – University Lecturers as Change Agents:
How Do They Perceive Their Professional Agency? 25

Chapter 3 – Developing Scenarios for Exploring Teacher Agency
in Universities: A Multimethod Study 51

Chapter 4 – Exploring Teacher Agency in Universities:
Three Types of Agentic Actions 81

Chapter 5 – Teacher Agency in Universities: Exploring Underlying
Beliefs and Agentic Orientations When Navigating University
Teaching Practices 109

Chapter 6 – General Discussion 135

References 155
Appendices (Related to Chapter 3) 175
Nederlandse samenvatting 185
English summary 193
Curriculum Vitae 199
List of publications 203
Acknowledgments 207
ICLON PhD Dissertation Series 213

Chapter 1

General Introduction

"It is the set of the sails, not [just] the direction of the wind, that determines which way we will go." This quote, often attributed to Jim Rohn, highlights the power of choice and direction amidst external forces. Similarly, teachers, like sailors, navigate their professional journeys through various external influences. The metaphor emphasizes the capacity to steer toward meaningful directions, aligning closely with the concept of teacher agency.

Teacher agency inhabits a central yet ambiguous place in educational discourse, embodying a blend of empowerment, professional autonomy, and decision-making authority in teaching contexts (Cong-Lem, 2021, 2024). Teacher agency is often used to refer to the capacity of teachers to actively contribute to shaping their teaching practices and conditions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). In academic and professional discourse, teacher agency is often portrayed as a prerequisite for educational reform, innovative pedagogy, and teaching and professional development (Annala et al., 2021). However, up to now, the term remains elusive, resisting precise delineation due to its multidimensional and context-dependent nature.

Teacher agency is sometimes perceived as a *fuzzy* concept shaped by the intricate interplay of multiple influencing factors. This *fuzziness* stems from the ambiguity and the dynamic interplay of individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, motivation, beliefs, and professional identity, as well as external influences like organizational culture and structure, and societal expectations (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Eteläpelto et al., 2014; Ursin et al., 2018; Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). As a result, teacher agency is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic construct that evolves within contexts and over time.

Acknowledging teacher agency as a concept shaped by individual characteristics, relational interactions, and contextual and temporal factors highlights the need to explore its multifaceted and evolving nature. Understanding teacher agency in this comprehensive way embraces the broader, nuanced contributions of teachers to the development of teaching practices. Consequently, teacher agency challenges traditional notions like "teacher quality" and calls for moving beyond reductive measures of teachers' capacities. Instead, it emphasizes the dynamic, context-sensitive, and creative

ways teachers navigate professional decision-making, offering a more accurate reflection of the practices that contribute to the quality of teaching (Van Vijfeijken et al., 2024). Considering the ambiguous and multifaceted nature of teacher agency enables a better understanding of how teachers shape teaching practices. By recognizing the complexity of teacher agency, more effective and responsive professional development initiatives can be fostered to empower university lecturers to enhance their teaching practices in meaningful and contextually relevant ways.

The studies in this dissertation are conducted within the context of research-intensive universities to gain a deeper understanding of lecturers' teacher agency and the dynamics of university teaching practices. Throughout this dissertation, the term "lecturers" refers to tenured faculty members at research-intensive universities who have both research and teaching tasks. These dual demands of research and teaching pose challenges and add to the complexity of their role. Moreover, lecturers operate within a complex landscape shaped by institutional policies, disciplinary norms, and the diversity of the student populations. By investigating teacher agency in universities, we gain a deep understanding of the *theory* and *practice* behind *why* and *how* lecturers shape and navigate their teaching practices. This understanding helps to reveal how lecturers adapt to diverse student needs, integrate innovative teaching methods, and balance their teaching responsibilities with research expectations. Furthermore, it informs institutional policies aimed at fostering teaching practices and supports and empowers lecturers in developing practices that align with their beliefs, disciplinary norms, and the evolving demands of universities. Ultimately, understanding teacher agency provides valuable insights into lecturers' decision-making and adaptations to enhance the quality of their teaching. Accordingly, the introduction is structured in three parts: first, *Understanding teacher agency*, second, *Why lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices*, and third, *How lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices*. An overview of the (aims of the) four studies concludes the introduction.

1.1 Understanding Teacher Agency

Agency is a concept that has been explored from various disciplinary perspectives and is commonly understood as an individual's capacity to act purposefully and make deliberate decisions (Jääskelä et al., 2017; Ruan et al., 2020). The concept of agency is essential in understanding how people navigate personal, professional, and societal domains. Yet, interpretations of the manifestations of agency naturally vary across and within disciplines. In this introductory chapter, we first provide a synopsis of varying conceptualizations and paradigms of agency. Since the primary focus in this dissertation is on teacher agency, paradigms such as collective or group agency and learner or student agency are beyond the scope of this discussion. Consequently, this synopsis here is not a comprehensive representation of all theories of agency. Moreover, there is no chronological order in the presentation of the different paradigms, but a purposeful thematic arrangement that highlights the diversity and complexity of perspectives and, hence, provides a basis to understand the research questions and upcoming chapters.

The Social Cognitive Theory defines agency as an individual's capacity to influence their circumstances through intentional action (Bandura, 2001). Central to Social Cognitive Theory is the concept of self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to achieve desired outcomes. This belief drives motivation, cognitive strategies, and emotional regulation, which enables individuals to overcome challenges and adapt to their environment. Bandura (2001) frames agency within a model of triadic reciprocal causation, highlighting the interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior. This individual-centric view stresses the role of internal mechanisms, such as resilience and self-regulation, in fostering agency and achieving personal growth.

The socio-cultural perspective on agency proposed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) defines agency as a temporally embedded process, a dynamic and ongoing activity that unfolds over time. Agency is conceptualized through three interrelated dimensions: the iterational dimension, which draws on past habits, experiences, and traditions; the projective dimension, which involves aspirations and future possibilities; and the practical-evaluative dimension,

which focuses on navigating and responding to the contingencies of the present. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) situate agency at the intersection of structure and autonomy, illustrating how individuals engage with, reproduce, and transform social structures over time. This relational and temporal perspective highlights the cultural, social, and temporal dynamics that shape human action. Building on this foundational understanding of agency, researchers can explore its application across various domains to gain deeper insights into how individuals interact with and influence professional spaces. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) further developed the concept of agency in professional contexts, highlighting the dynamic interplay between individual subjectivity and socio-cultural environments. Professional agency is a dynamic process of negotiating identity, workplace roles, and socio-cultural constraints (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Ursin et al., 2018; Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). Adopting a subject-centered socio-cultural perspective, this perspective assumes that individuals both shape and are shaped by their professional spaces. This perspective integrates insights from educational sciences, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences to show how professionals exercise agency in learning, identity development, and organizational transformation.

Toom et al. (2015) specified the professional agency framework by focusing on teacher agency, defining it as the capacity of teachers for intentional, contextually situated action. Emphasizing the situational and relational aspects of agency, Toom and colleagues (2015) highlight how teachers navigate between personal values, professional beliefs, and systemic demands. Agency, in their perspective, is constructed through interactions with institutional structures, colleagues, and students. Toom et al. (2015) stress the importance of empowering teachers to align personal and professional goals with institutional requirements, thereby fostering pedagogical innovation and meaningful educational practices.

Priestley et al. (2015) extend the understanding of teacher agency through an ecological model, which situates agency within a dynamic interplay of individual, structural, and cultural factors. Unlike purely individualistic or temporal approaches, their model emphasizes that agency is not an inherent trait or capacity, but rather an emergent phenomenon influenced by the interactions between teachers and their environments. Central to the ecological model is the

recognition that teacher agency is contextually situated and mediated by social structures, material resources, and cultural norms within schools and broader educational systems. By acknowledging this complexity, the ecological model highlights the importance of fostering environments that enable teachers to exercise agency through reflective practice, collaboration, and access to supportive structures. This approach provides a holistic framework for understanding how teachers navigate systemic challenges, enact meaningful change, and contribute to the transformation of educational practices.

Though distinct, the perspectives outlined above share common themes. All emphasize agency as a contextually embedded process, influenced by individual capacities, interactions, and contexts. While Bandura (2001) highlights the role of internal mechanisms and self-efficacy, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) focus on the temporal and relational dynamics of agency. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) and Toom et al. (2015) examine agency through a professional lens, exploring how agency manifests in workplace and educational settings, and Priestley et al. (2015) enrich this understanding by framing agency as an emergent, ecological phenomenon. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of agency as a critical concept for navigating and transforming complex environments. The context of these theories lies mainly in primary and secondary education. Since university teaching differs to some extent from primary and secondary education due to its unique disciplinary-specific structures (Annala et al., 2021), the next section discusses why lecturers need agency in university teaching practices.

1.2 Why Lecturers Shape and Navigate Teaching Practices

In the dynamics of university teaching, lecturers need to adapt and refine practices to address the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing educational landscape. Consequently, understanding why lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices is important because it provides critical insights into the decision-making processes and the contextual factors influencing their approaches. As key agents of knowledge generation and dissemination, university

lecturers play a critical role in both academic progress and societal development (Dall'Alba, 2005). Lecturers contribute to the three core missions of the university: research, teaching, and service (Cummings, 1998). As universities strive to meet societal demands, lecturers are expected to innovate their teaching practices to address emerging societal challenges.

Lecturers are tasked with implementing innovative teaching strategies that align with 21st-century skills, for example, which require substantial time for preparation, planning, and execution, and designing alternative assessments aimed at enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (Ujir et al., 2020). A major shift in the last decade is digitalization, which has received much attention in recent years due to the digital transformation taking place within universities (Fernández et al., 2023). The shift to blended and online learning demands that lecturers adapt their teaching methods, a transition that can pose considerable challenges for fostering student engagement (Wang et al., 2024). At the same time, massification (i.e., increasing student numbers) alongside administrative responsibilities, such as course coordination and managing student activities, further complicates teaching practices (Macfarlane, 2010; Noui, 2020).

Structural and ideological changes have impacted universities in a number of ways, which can be attributed to the entry of neoliberalism in universities. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has had a profound impact on universities, influencing governance, funding, and the design of education systems (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Sá & Amaral, 2023). In the current neoliberal climate, Western universities tend to emphasize competitiveness and efficiency over critical thinking, creativity, and the role of education in fostering critical citizens (Giroux, 2010). The rise of neoliberal policies has transformed universities by introducing corporate managerial practices focused on efficiency and revenue maximization. Consequently, universities have expanded their student enrollment to increase tuition income (Ball, 2012; Sá & Amaral, 2023). This shift reflects a broader trend of treating education as a market commodity, in which universities respond to consumer demands rather than prioritizing purely educational considerations (Furlong, 2012). To illustrate, quality assurance frameworks, such as the National Student Survey and Teaching Excellence

Framework (Marshall, 2023), prioritize measurable outcomes like student satisfaction, retention rates, and employability (Giroux, 2010; Sá & Amaral, 2023). Lecturers must align their teaching methods with institutional quality benchmarks, often focusing on survey feedback and rankings, while balancing innovation with accountability. The commodification of universities positions students as consumers, emphasizing measurable effectiveness (Ball, 2012; Sá & Amaral, 2023). As a result, lecturers are expected to deliver engaging, high-impact learning experiences while meeting consumerist expectations, demonstrating tangible outcomes such as graduate employability and skill development.

Related to the entry of neoliberalism in universities, global massification has led to a more diverse student body, encompassing a wide range of demographics, socioeconomic backgrounds, and learning needs (Giroux, 2010). This diversity enriches the learning environment but also demands more inclusive teaching practices. Lecturers are expected to employ teaching strategies to cater to a wide range of capacities and expectations, including differentiated instruction and culturally responsive pedagogies. Addressing individual student needs requires additional time and effort, particularly for students who lack traditional academic preparation (Dias, 2014; Giroux, 2010). The expansion of universities is essential from the standpoint of equality. Fortunately, universities are no longer just for the elite. However, the growing student population places significant pressure on lecturers, who must balance increased teaching and administrative demands while maintaining high-quality instruction and meaningful student interactions (Kenny, 2017).

To contribute to teaching development, lecturers are pivotal in implementing institutional strategies for quality enhancement, equity, and technological innovation. As the primary link between institutions and students, lecturers negotiate policies and strategies in practice (Furlong, 2012). Lecturers balance institutional goals with pedagogical values and beliefs, requiring lecturers to achieve agency. The interplay between institutional expectations and why lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices sets the stage for exploring how lecturers navigate their teaching practices to balance strategic objectives with their professional beliefs and contextual realities.

1.3 How Lecturers Shape and Navigate Teaching Practices

University lecturers are central in leveraging their expertise and capacities to create meaningful changes that enhance teaching practices and outcomes (cf. Heikonen et al., 2020). Lecturers' contributions to the teaching practice extend beyond the classroom and often involve innovative curriculum design and improving teaching methodologies (Van Dijk et al., 2020). Thus, how lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices should be an integral part of the evaluation of teacher quality. However, traditional methods of assessing lecturers, such as Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), often fail to capture this broader impact. Instead, SET provides a narrow and sometimes misleading perspective on lecturers' teaching expertise (Hornstein, 2017). SET functions more as a customer satisfaction metric rather than as an accurate measure of teaching quality, relying on subjective judgments and inconsistent criteria (Spooren et al., 2013; Stroebe, 2020; Uttl et al., 2017). SET ratings are often influenced by personal biases and fail to account for the complexities of teaching contexts, including class size, subject matter, and the diversity of student needs. Additionally, these evaluation tools rarely provide constructive feedback, limiting opportunities for professional growth (Hendry & Dean, 2002). A narrow focus on quantitative measures diminishes the recognition of lecturers as professionals who reflect on, adapt, and innovate their practice. Instead, it is more important to examine how lecturers engage in teaching and contribute to teaching development. Teacher agency provides a holistic perspective on lecturers' expertise, highlighting their capacity to make informed, purposeful decisions in specific contexts.

Understanding how lecturers shape teaching practices is necessary for fostering the quality of teaching (Van Dijk et al., 2020). Lecturers' actions in response to specific situated challenges and opportunities in their teaching context give insight into lecturers' capacity to make informed decisions, take innovative actions, and foster continuous professional development (Hadar & Benish-Weisman, 2018). Furthermore, teacher agency drives individual and institutional progress, fostering innovation and empowering lecturers to shape their work conditions (Datnow, 2012; Priestley et al., 2015). Recognizing this

impact substantiates the need to embrace teacher agency as a quality, moving beyond narrow evaluation metrics and adopting more holistic approaches to assessing and supporting lecturers. By valuing lecturers' professional judgment and encouraging continuous development, universities can create a culture of learning and excellence that benefits both lecturers and students (Ferman, 2002). Teacher agency emphasizes a more dynamic understanding of lecturers' roles, highlighting the capacity to influence their environment and continually improve through deliberate decision- and meaning-making (Ursin et al., 2018).

Ultimately, when lecturers have the capacity and support to make purposeful decisions, they are better equipped to design dynamic and inclusive learning experiences. Teacher agency is essential for redefining and improving teaching quality in universities. It enables lecturers to respond thoughtfully to challenges, explore new approaches, and contribute to the broader missions of their institutions. As noted, commonly used evaluation methods fall short of dignifying "how lecturers take action." Therefore, a holistic way in which to assess lecturers' actions within different teaching situations is more appropriate. However, correctly evaluating actions that shape and navigate teaching is challenging.

Challenges in Measuring Teacher Agency

Measuring teacher agency presents unique challenges due to the dynamic, context-dependent, and temporally embedded nature of the concept (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Unlike static traits or behaviors that can be universally defined and quantified, teacher agency is a fluid construct that evolves and is shaped by the interplay of specific spatial and situational factors (Rushton & Bird, 2024). These characteristics make it difficult to make generic, definitive statements about teacher agency without accounting for the contexts and timeframes in which it is expressed (Kusters et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges requires both an understanding of the specific difficulties involved and the development of tailored solutions.

The manifestations of agency are not uniform across individuals or settings, nor is it consistent within the same individual over time. A lecturer's capacity to act purposefully and make decisions is influenced by factors such

as institutional culture, policy mandates, available resources, and the specific demands of students (Leijen et al., 2024). For example, agency among lecturers in a department with supportive leadership may manifest as increased creativity, while agency among lecturers in a department with systemic challenges may manifest as resilience and adaptability. There is thus a need for measurement tools that take these contextual differences into account (Cong-Lem, 2021). To address this, measurement frameworks must be designed to explicitly capture the contextual nature of agency. This involves empirically investigating lecturers' agentic actions and considerations in their daily professional contexts. To ground the understanding of agency in the lived realities of teaching, researchers must examine how lecturers navigate diverse teaching challenges, the intentions behind their actions, the beliefs guiding their choices, and the impact of institutional expectations and cultural dynamics.

Teacher agency is dynamic and shaped by personal development, professional experiences, and external conditions. It is further influenced by factors such as perceptions of leadership styles, cultural norms, and systemic changes, including educational reforms or societal crises (Annala et al., 2021; Green & Pappa, 2020; Priestley et al., 2015). For example, a lecturer's sense of agency may differ early in their career compared to after years of experience. Additionally, expressions of agency can vary based on the teaching context. In large, diverse lecture settings, agency might involve using active learning strategies, such as technology-based polling or real-time discussion platforms, to engage all students in a heterogeneous group, while in more homogeneous groups, it may involve fostering personalized discussions and peer collaboration to address specific challenges.

To measure teacher agency while accounting for its context-dependent nature, it is essential to use flexible and adaptive tools that accommodate diverse contexts. These tools should include both core aspects of agency and context-specific challenges (Annala et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2023). By empirically investigating how agency manifests in particular events and designing tools that reflect dynamic teaching practices, researchers enable a more accurate and nuanced measurement of teacher agency (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020; Toom, 2019). Integrating context-specific situations further clarifies how external

affordances interact with personal beliefs and values to shape agency. This focus ensures a holistic understanding of teacher agency, revealing not only the individual efforts of teachers but also the systemic factors that enable or hinder them.

In summary, understanding and fostering teacher agency in universities is essential for the continued development and success of universities. Teacher agency serves as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation, professional growth, and educational quality. It enables lecturers to deliver dynamic, student-centered learning experiences while contributing to institutional development and student success. As universities face new and complex challenges, prioritizing teacher agency will be key to maintaining educational excellence and ensuring that universities remain a transformative force for individuals and society. We argued that recognizing the multidimensional nature of teaching at universities cannot be adequately captured by student evaluations alone. Instead, it requires a formative approach that accounts for the dynamic and complex nature of teaching. Evaluating lecturers through the lens of teacher agency provides a meaningful framework for this purpose. In this introduction, we highlighted both the inherent complexity of the concept of teacher agency and its potential for deeper exploration. Given the nuanced and context-specific nature of teacher agency, there is a pressing need for a measurement instrument that reflects these dynamics. The evolving university landscape calls for a nuanced understanding of teacher agency, particularly in terms of how and why lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices in this dynamic landscape.

1.4 Research aims

This dissertation aims to enhance our understanding of why and how university lecturers shape and navigate their teaching practices, thereby contributing valuable insights into teacher agency. Four studies were conducted to explore: (1) current manifestations of professional teacher agency among university lecturers, (2) how an assessment tool can be developed to capture the context-

dependent nature of teacher agency, (3) what kind of agentic actions lecturers employ in university teaching practices, and (4) the role of underlying beliefs about teaching and learning in shaping and navigating these practices. The first study was designed to investigate whether lecturers' agency was visible and to gain an initial understanding of what is occurring in universities. Thus, we set up the following study:

1. An exploratory interview study to explore how university lecturers perceive their professional agency.

While the findings were promising, we observed that a generic framework, such as the professional agency theory (Vähäsantanen et al. 2020), was too broad to fully capture the dynamic nature of teacher agency. We noticed that in order to capture the context-specific dimensions of agency, we need to include specific teaching situations in exploring teacher agency. Consequently, we adopted the ecological model (Priestley et al., 2015), which provides a more nuanced perspective on teacher agency. Since this model was originally developed in the context of curriculum reform in Scottish secondary schools, further adaptation and exploration were required to apply it effectively to the university teaching context. Therefore:

2. A methodological study was conducted to develop a set of context-specific teaching scenarios that elicit teacher agency in universities.

After designing and validating the scenarios, we conducted the third and fourth studies, utilizing the scenarios as tools for scenario-based interviews.

3. This scenario-based study explored responses to teaching scenarios to develop a typology of agentic actions.

Once we had a framework of agentic actions, in the final study we examined why and how lecturers navigate university teaching practices.

4. A combination of semi-structured and scenario-based interviews explored what kind of beliefs were underlying the typology of agentic actions.

With these four studies, we aim to contribute theoretical insights into the nuanced and context-dependent nature of teacher agency in university teaching. By systematically exploring how university lecturers perceive, enact, and

navigate teacher agency, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between beliefs, considerations, intentions, and contextual influences in shaping teaching practices. This dissertation not only advances theoretical frameworks, such as the ecological model of teacher agency, but also offers practical implications on how university lecturers can be supported to critically engage with and adapt their teaching in diverse and dynamic teaching spaces.

1.5 Outline of this dissertation

This dissertation contains six chapters. The next four chapters include the studies described in the previous paragraph. In the final chapter, the findings of all four studies are summarized and discussed. Together, the chapters contribute to the research aim of understanding why and how university lecturers shape and navigate their teaching practices, thereby contributing theoretical insights into teacher agency. See Figure 1.1 for an overview of this dissertation.

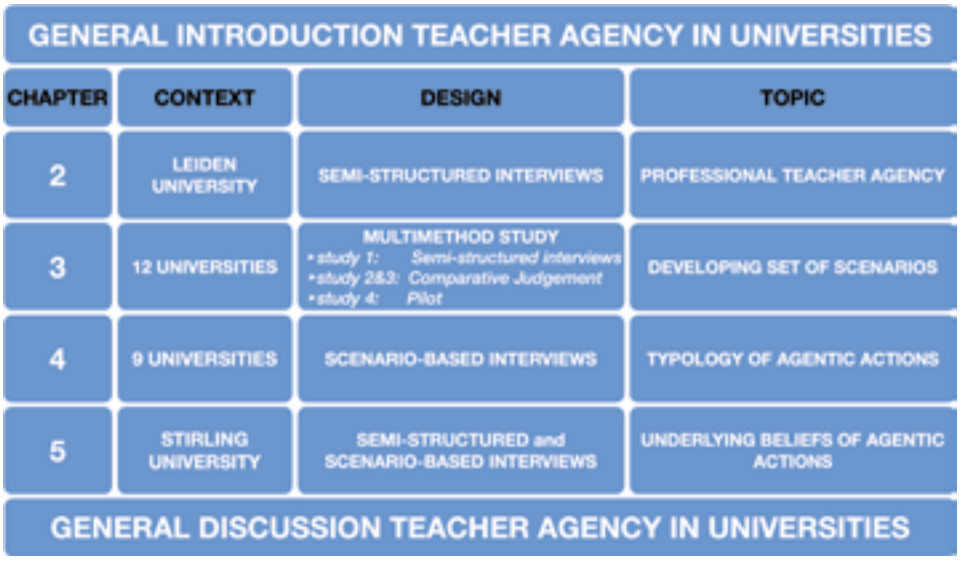

Figure 1.1

Overview of this Dissertation

In Chapter 2, an exploratory interview study is presented, focusing on understanding university lecturers' perceptions of their professional agency and their roles as change agents in teaching. The study investigates lecturers' experiences in three core areas of professional agency: influencing university teaching, developing university teaching, and negotiating teacher identity.

The guiding research question is: What are the characteristics of professional agency as identified by lecturers in the academic teaching context? This inquiry is structured to explore the extent of lecturers' influence on teaching practices, the collaborative and individual efforts in educational development, and the negotiation of professional identity within institutional frameworks. To address these questions, the study employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (n=35) with university lecturers across multiple departments. The interviews, conducted in Dutch, lasted 40–60 minutes each, and thematic analysis was applied using a framework developed by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019). Key themes were coded based on indicators of influencing work, developing practices, and identity negotiation, with iterative refinement ensuring comprehensive coverage.

In Chapter 3, a multimethod research study is presented that aims to develop scenarios as tools for understanding and measuring teacher agency in universities. The central research question guiding this study is: In what ways can representative scenarios be developed to measure teacher agency in universities? Four sub-questions addressed specific dimensions of this inquiry:

1. What themes of university teaching are representative for scenario development?
2. Should scenarios be framed in first- or third-person perspectives, and should they feature open- or closed-ended formats?
3. How do experts evaluate scenarios' likelihood of eliciting teacher agency?
4. To what extent do scenarios resonate with lecturers and elicit multiple solutions?

To explore these questions, four interconnected studies were conducted using a combination of qualitative interviews, expert panels, and pilot testing:

- **Study 1** involved interviews with university lecturers (n=28) to identify

"bumpy moments" in teaching that require agentic responses. These moments were analyzed to generate 24 themes, forming the basis for scenario development.

- **Study 2** engaged an expert panel (n=37) to evaluate scenarios for their narrative perspective and design. First-person, open-ended scenarios were found to be the most effective.
- **Study 3** used another expert panel (n=13) to assess the likelihood of specific scenarios eliciting teacher agency. Qualitative feedback informed refinements to scenario content and design.
- **Study 4** piloted the scenarios with university lecturers (n=30) through think-aloud sessions. Participants provided multiple solutions to scenarios, confirming their utility in eliciting teacher agency.

In Chapter 4, a scenario-based study is presented, examining the agentic actions demonstrated by university lecturers within teaching contexts. The study aims to explore the following research question: What agentic actions do university lecturers articulate in the context of teaching? Specifically, the study focuses on identifying how lecturers' actions align with the cultural, structural, and material dimensions of the ecological model's practical-evaluative framework.
To investigate this question, we employed a qualitative research design featuring 30 lecturers from nine research-intensive universities in the Netherlands. Data were collected through scenario-based interviews using the set of 23 pre-validated scenarios from Chapter 3, reflecting real-life teaching challenges. Each participant selected scenarios they identified with and described the actions they would take in response, enabling the study to analyze deliberate and intentional actions that reflect teacher agency.

In Chapter 5, a qualitative research study is presented, investigating the interplay between university lecturers' beliefs and their agentic actions in teaching contexts. This study aims to address the research question: What shared beliefs about teaching do university lecturers express, and how are these reflected in their agentic orientations? To explore this, the study employed a scenario-based approach combined with semi-structured interviews, involving 12 participants from the Education Division of a Scottish university. Participants engaged with

the 23 validated scenarios (Chapter 3) that reflected real-life teaching challenges, followed by interviews exploring their professional beliefs and motivations. The typology of agentic actions from Chapter 4 was used to categorize how lecturers shaped and navigated scenarios with agentic orientations.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a compendium and general discussion of the findings of the studies from the previous chapters and then concludes with theoretical and practical implications arising from the findings of this dissertation.

Chapter 2

University Lecturers as Change Agents: How Do They Perceive Their Professional Agency?

This chapter was published in an adapted form as:
Kusters, M., Van der Rijst, R., De Vetten, A., & Admiraal, W. (2023). University lecturers as change agents: How do they perceive their professional agency? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 127, 104097.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104097

Abstract

The delicate balance between teaching and research in university makes professional agency an imperative topic to be studied in teacher development research. The importance of teacher agency for professional development and sustainable educational change is increasingly recognized. This interview study highlights lecturers' experiences regarding ways to influence and develop their teaching practices. Lecturers stated that they would like to do more educational development. Findings also indicate that the concept of professional agency should be adapted to the particular context of university teaching. Our study therefore provides a more specific interpretation of professional agency applied to teaching.

2.1 Introduction

Educational development in university teaching will be promoted in a more sustainable way if university lecturers take their role as change agents (Priestley et al., 2012). For this, teachers' knowledge and teaching skills are highly important (Evans, 2017), but not sufficient (Vähäsantanen, 2015). The ability of teachers to make choices and implement actions to effect change is often referred to as teacher agency (Cong-Lem, 2021). Thus, educational change agents also need strong teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), which can be seen as a particular form of professional agency as defined by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019). In this definition, professional agents are able to 1) influence their work, 2) develop work practices, and 3) negotiate professional identity. However, in current literature the components of "teacher agency in university teaching" have not yet been described. Consequently, it is unclear what constitutes agency in university and how lecturers can become change agents.

Understanding how components of teacher agency are perceived in a university context will enable us to better support lecturers in taking on a role as educational developers and contributing to teaching quality in their programs. To embark on work with lecturers to promote agency, it first needs to be clear how it is perceived by them. That information is not available in university teaching practice. In this study, we take an "emic" perspective and study lecturers' perspectives on their own teaching in order to get an in-depth understanding of teacher agency in university.

2.1.1 Teacher agency

Different conceptualizations of teacher agency have been presented. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) have built on the theoretical traditions in the conceptualization of professional agency at work. They argue that professional agency applies when professionals exercise influence, make choices or defend perspectives that impact their professional identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, 2014).

Toom et al. (2015) note that teacher agency has been identified in the literature as active involvement in designing and directing the professional

working environments. This makes teacher agency a key element for continuing professional development and school development. For example, Durrant (2019) defines teacher agency as teachers' ability to prepare and implement educational changes, and to direct and constrain their decision making in educational settings. Related to this definition, Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2017) define agency as the ability to act purposefully, which implies will, autonomy, freedom and choice. Applied to teaching practice, agency refers to the ability of teachers to act according to their own goals independently of the rules and directives of their immediate environment.

Biesta et al. (2015) describe agency from an ecological perspective in which they distinguish three dimensions. The "iterational" dimension reflects that agency should reactivate an individual's past achievements and understandings selectively. The iterational aspect in teacher agency depends on personal beliefs, capacity, and values informed by experiences and daily interactions with colleagues (Leijen et al., 2020). The "practical-evaluative" dimension centers on the present within which a teacher acts out of agency, with the present period relying on past and expected future experiences. The "projective" dimension projects a teacher's intentions to change their future based on past and present goals. Leijen et al. (2020) emphasize that these include not only professional goals, but also personal long-term goals. These dimensions influence a teacher's capacity and willingness to make desirable professional changes.

The common factor in the above teacher agency definitions is that agentic teachers can propose changes in their work environment. This is manifested in critical involvement in education, and a willingness to develop and influence one's own teaching practice as well as of others, and act from one's own professional identity, beliefs, and values (Biesta et al., 2015; Brodie, 2019; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). In line with this view, Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) distinguish three components of professional agency (i.e., *influencing at work*, *developing work practices*, and *negotiating professional identity*) in their study of different professional groups in Finland. These components are therefore useful for identifying the agency of academics.

Teacher agency is considered a particular form of professional agency; therefore, it is not clear how these three components are perceived in the university teaching practice. Consequently, we cannot apply the three components proposed by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) indiscriminately in university teaching practice. We will first need to investigate how these components are perceived by lecturers. Only by knowing how the components are perceived and interpreted can we explore how to support lecturers in building the capacity to adjust or reject recently established procedures and programs. As a result, *lecturers as change agents* can affect outcomes of change initiatives at the national and organizational level (Tao & Gao, 2017). In the next section, we first explain each component and explore the implications for university teaching practice. Then, the context and aim of our study are discussed in more detail.

2.1.2 Influencing at work

Influencing at work consists of two overlapping subcomponents: a) "decision making at work," and b) "being heard at work" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). "Decision making at work" refers to how decision making takes place and how the work is carried out, regulated and reformatted. Making decisions allows professionals to influence their work, ideally from their own professional beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015; Brodie, 2019). In the second subcomponent ("being heard at work"), agency involves expressing ideas that are truly heard and acknowledged. Such actions can include voicing opinions and taking positions on both individual and collaborative work practices. Thus, *influencing at work* includes being able to make decisions to make sure one's own work and opinions are taken into account in the workplace (Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). Moreover, Annala et al. (2021) state that agency in curriculum change is supported more if teachers are involved in the decision-making process underlying an innovation; they take on their role as change agents. Involving teachers in decision making contributes to a stronger sense of agency on their part.

Accordingly, a strong sense of agency could result from being able to make one's own work-related choices and express one's own opinions. The concept of teacher autonomy concerns the extent to which teaching practices are

regulated and controlled by actors inside and outside university, including national resources and regulations. Conversely, the concept of teacher agency concerns teachers' ability and desire to build their agency within these frameworks, by adopting and adapting policies to influence specific practices (Priestley et al., 2015). Traditionally, a university has always been a place where teachers operate autonomously, and academics are given and experience a high degree of freedom (Andreescu, 2009). Even so, more than the experience of autonomy may be required for teachers to have a strong sense of influence in their work.

2.1.3 Developing work practices

The component *developing work practices* consists of two overlapping subcomponents: "participation in shared work practices" and "transforming work practices" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). "Participating in shared work practices" can take the form of commenting and voicing one's opinion in the workplace, as well as collaborating and participating in the organization's development programs. "Transforming work practices" can refer, for example, to actions that challenge and problematize the current state of work. Or more proactively, to the creation of new ideas and practical solutions to change the way people work. *Developing work practices* thus involves trying out new ideas and proposing ways to improve collective work practices (Vähäsantanen et al., 2019).

Collaboration with colleagues and the conditions under which this occurs are regarded as a necessary requirement for providing stimulating and effective education. For example, Tigelaar et al., (2006) cites that observing colleagues and revisiting lessons together with colleagues are important reflection methods for developing teaching. However, results from Vähäsantanen et al., (2020) indicate that lecturers would like to work together, but that this is sometimes impossible, for example due to time and physical distance. Yet it is important to promote cooperation. Generating routines creates teamwork, allowing professional meanings to be quickly shared across professional practice boundaries (Edwards, 2005).

2.1.4 Negotiating professional identity

Negotiating professional identity consists of two overlapping subcomponents: "professional identity" and "constructing a professional career" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). Professional identity should be understood as professional engagements, beliefs and values, as well as future career perspectives (Van Winkel et al., 2018). Professionals with a sense of professional agency believe that their choices are directed by their own purposes and interests, that they have control over their choices (Ketelaar et al., 2012), and that agency involves acting on one's moral beliefs and aspirations (Biesta et al., 2015; Van Lankveld et al., 2016). As working conditions change, there is a particular need to re-evaluate professional identity in light of changing tasks. Hinostroza-Paredes (2021) states that professionals are expected to manifest agency by acting on their career-related decisions, thus "constructing a professional career." Therefore, *negotiating professional identity* includes the ability to act according to one's own beliefs and values and to advance one's career (Van Winkel et al., 2018; Vähäsantanen et al., 2019). Yet identity formation does not depend solely on personal values, but is also influenced by the institutional culture.

The development and formation of teacher identity is highly dependent on influences from the work environment (Van Lankveld et al., 2016). It is not easy for lecturers to find like-minded people in teaching practice because the organizational structures of a university consist of different departments. Hence, lecturers are more likely to work together because of similar research topics rather than because of a shared vision of teaching. The delicate balance between research and teaching is vital in how colleagues view teaching. For this reason, professional identity is important in agency research, because it could be a link between standing up for one's own values on the one hand and participating in the development processes of the university on the other (Van Lankveld et al., 2016). To maintain dedication on the part of lecturers and allow them to negotiate their professional identity, lecturers need sufficient opportunities to exercise agency within their institution. In an educational organisation this means that lecturers have the opportunity to exercise their unique professional vision, effectively restructure the conditions and materials of their work, and express their views on social issues and organisational factors.

2.1.5 Professional agency in the university context

The three components described above are valid for various occupations, including in university, but not yet for lecturers' teaching practices specifically. These components make the concept of professional agency helpful in recognizing agency in work. However, the three components are generic and explained in the light of various contexts. It is, therefore, not possible to say with certainty that the indicators of a generic model can be recognized directly in a specific educational context. Therefore, it is vital to hold the components against the light of university educational practice so that the indicators do justice to the components.

A characteristic of academic work is that lecturers perform multiple roles, i.e., researching, teaching and possibly working in a clinical situation or practice context. In addition, lecturers often deal with administrative or managerial roles. These multiple roles have implications for the meaning of the three components of professional agency, showing that different academic tasks can be strongly interrelated or influence each other (e.g., in terms of time and task priority). Because in this study we want to investigate how lecturers manifest their agency in the teaching practice, we need a deep understanding of teachers' agency in teaching roles. To understand the ways lecturers in practice influence their work, develop their work practices, and negotiate their professional identity, we have taken an "emic" perspective and investigated lecturers' perspectives on their own teaching and development. The research question is as follows: *Which characteristics of the three components of professional agency do lecturers identify in academic teaching practice?*

2.2 Method

We conducted an interview study to investigate lecturers' perspectives toward their teacher agency. The three components developed by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) provided the framework for each interview. Within this general framework, participants were invited to provide their own stories either related to these components or not. This natural interview method combines theory-

driven method with a completely open phenomenological approach (cf. Seidman, 2006).

2.2.1 Participants

Interviews were conducted with 35 lecturers (15 female, 20 male) from the seven departments of a research-intensive university in the Netherlands (see Table 2.1). The researchers recruited the lecturers through their own professional networks. We wanted to examine perceptions of lecturers with both teaching and research duties. Only lecturers with a PhD were included to exclude a sessional teaching staff who are often hired temporarily to teach exclusively. Two deviating cases were also included: two PhD candidates at the end of their doctoral studies with explicitly defined teaching tasks in their employment contracts. All participants had experience in teaching in small-group settings. In addition, most also had experience giving lectures. During the interviews, they were specifically asked about the context of teaching, i.e., working group or lecture. In order to obtain a representative sample of the population, program coordinators from different faculties were approached with a request to find suitable participants for this study, together with a flyer in digital form briefly explaining the purpose of the project. The coordinator sent a list of interested lecturers to the principal investigator, who then contacted the potential participant. A letter with more information - such as the procedure of the project - was sent along with the initial contact between researcher and lecturer.

This paper focuses on a group of lecturers who have explicit teaching duties in their employment contracts besides their research task, including assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Only three lecturers had less than five years of teaching experience, and over sixty percent of the participants had more than ten years' teaching experience (see Table 2.1).

2.2.2 Data collection

To explore characteristics of professional agency individual interviews with lecturers were conducted in Dutch. Each interview 1) took place online due to the measures concerning the COVID-19 pandemic; 2) lasted forty to sixty

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Participants and Occupational Status

Gender and Occupational Status	Archaeology	Governance and Global Affairs	Humanities	Law	Medicine / University Medical Centre	Science	Social and Behavioural Sciences	Full sample	
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	%
Gender									
Female	2	1	4	1	3	1	3	15	42.9
Male	1	1	4	2	3	9	–	20	57.1
Position									
PhD candidate	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	2	6.7[a]
Assistant prof.	2	2	4	1	dna	7	1	17	56.7[a]
Associate prof.	1	–	4	1	dna	2	–	8	26.7[a]
Full prof.	–	–	–	1	1	–	1	3	10.0[a]
Experience									
0–5	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	3	8.6
5–10	–	–	2	–	1	5	1	9	25.7
10–15	1	2	–	1	2	3	–	9	25.7
>15	1	–	6	2	2	1	1	13	37.1
Qualification									
UTQ	3	2	8	3	6	10	3	35	100.0
STQ	2	2	7	2	4	1	–	18	51.4

Note. $N = 35$. UTQ = University Teaching Qualification. STQ = Senior Teaching Qualification.

[a] Based on 30 participants (the Faculty of Medicine was excluded due to different designations for academic positions).

minutes; and 3) was recorded with the lecturer's permission. Ethical approval was given by the faculty's ethical review committee.

2.2.3 Interview procedure

In order to extract as much information as possible from the interviews open-ended questions were asked. We asked participants about their experiences in university teaching, being particularly interested in the three components of professional agency. We used three main questions for this purpose: "How is the decision-making process regarding your teaching tasks?", "What do you see as your responsibilities as a teacher?" and "Why are you/are you not explicitly engaged in professional development of yourself in teaching practice?" Follow-up questions were asked to receive further explanations, clarifications or summary of what has been said. In order to ensure integrity and protect the privacy of interviewees, certain precautions were taken: 1) consent was sought prior to the interview and recording, and interviewees had the right to stop the recording at any time; 2) care was taken to ensure that participants fully understood the purpose of the study, by checking for any ambiguities prior to the interview, and emphasizing that the interview recordings were for research purposes only; 3) the transcripts were treated anonymously – with the exception of the principal investigator – and the names of the participants were replaced with fictitious names in the report; 4) transcripts of the interviews and the results of this study were sent to interviewees on request.

2.2.4 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed in Atlas.ti by the principal investigator, in collaboration with the other authors. We conducted thematic analyses, based on the framework of Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) to get lecturers' stories about each main component of their agency. The interview transcripts were coded with the three main codes (*influencing at work, developing work practices*, or *negotiating professional identity)* and the start of a new code was the start of a new coding unit. Each of the three main codes was described based on a list of indicators. This list was developed based on the first four transcripts and supplemented based on the next sets of four transcripts. This process continued

until after the 15th transcript no new indicators were found (see Figure 2.1). For the purpose of transferability, we provide thick descriptions of the citations in the results section below (Guba, 1981).

2.3 Results

We present the research findings by evaluating the three components of professional agency (i.e., *influencing at work, developing work practices,* and *negotiating professional identity*) against university teaching practice. Therefore, we have outlined indicators for each of the three categories and renamed these as *influencing university teaching, developing university teaching,* and *negotiating teacher identity*. Each indicator in Figure 2.1 is explained, in most cases through a necessarily shortened quote from a participant. This section looks in greater depth at how the three components are interpreted in the academic context.

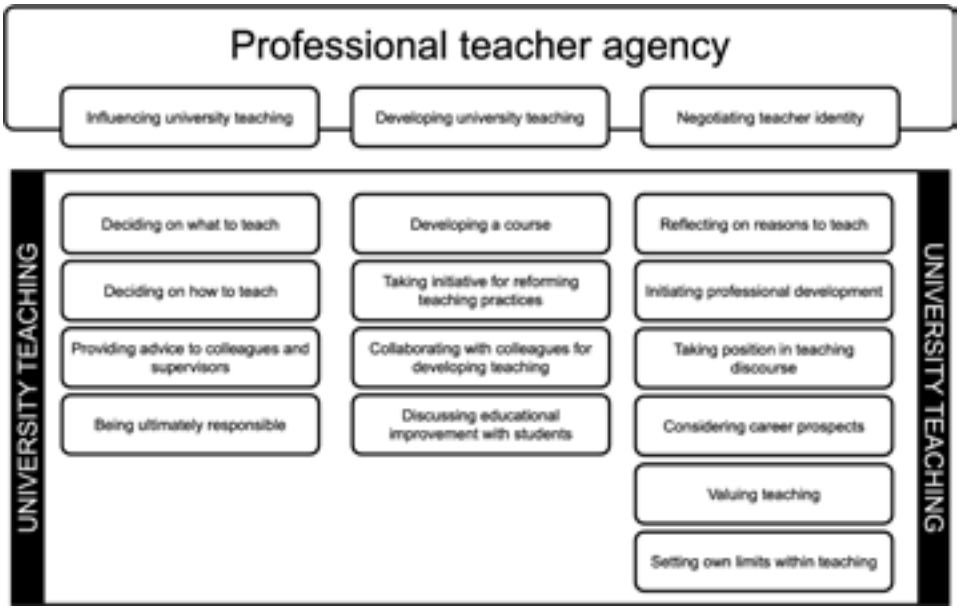

Figure 2.1
Indicators of Teacher Agency in University Teaching

2.3.1 Influencing university teaching

Lecturers feel they have a great deal of control in their teaching practice. This influence is often linked to the freedom they have in teaching, i.e., freedom to design a course. The lecturers stated that they experience having influence because they are the ones who are *deciding on what* and *how to teach*. Generally, the curriculum is set by, for example, the Director of Education, but the lecturer is responsible for content, teaching approach, learning assignments, and assessment. Most lecturers are also active in various other roles such as administration (program chair, exam committee member, etc.) in which they also experience different forms of influencing. With regard to teaching practices, course programs and schedules are usually predetermined, but there is a lot of freedom as far as content is concerned. As Patrick states:

> *…So about bureaucratic work processes, for example, staff members should record the grades and the department wants a signed piece of paper. Well, this is a 1999 procedure, you can keep saying how much time it takes, how annoying it is. But nothing is ever done about it. It is irritating and I have no influence on it. ... But within our institute, we actually have quite a lot of freedom when it comes to content. If you want to give a course on your own research, you can. If you want to emphasise certain points and it's not weird accents or crazy politically coloured things, you can. That's the freedom you have, even in organizing the tests.*

Patrick mentions here that there are some fixed bureaucratic procedures within the university that lecturers have no influence over. However, with regard to the design of their teaching, lecturers feel complete autonomy – here perceived by the lecturer as "having influence." Another example of experiencing influence is the emphasis lecturers put on having ample room to express opinions about teaching-related issues, and that lecturers' *providing advice to colleagues and supervisors* is also a way of experiencing influence. Kyle phrases this as follows:

> *I do think that you are listened to, because there are consultation bodies. ... They go into great detail about how things went, what can be improved etc. So I think you can exert some influence also by providing colleagues with advice. If we*

want to expand it [the program]*, it will be considered. So I think you do have influence on what happens in the educational field.*

So, although lecturers generally feel they are listened to, they also mention the hierarchical "layers" within the university. Aimee stresses it is easier to have influence in one layer than in another:

It is sometimes a bit unclear whom you should approach. There are many layers and the channels are not always clear, but I do think we are heard. Of course, something is not always done with it, cannot always be done with it. But I do think that the lines of communication are getting better and better…Yes, communication with teaching staff has improved over the past few years.

This example illustrates that although teachers can express themselves, it is not always clear to whom they had best to do so or what will be done with it. Finally, the indicator *being ultimately responsible* for the course or teaching was found. This means that teachers see responsibility as a form of influence because they have to make decisions about, for example, the content or final form of the exam.

2.3.2 Developing university teaching

Lecturers felt involved in the development, especially as they individually were *developing a course.* Since lecturers experience great freedom and ownership in their teaching practice, they all mentioned that they are *taking initiative for reforming teaching practices,* such as modifying teaching content. Kian states that he contributes to the development of education by designing his own courses, and therefore experiences ownership over his courses:

I have developed all courses myself. It's a pretty unique position there, we realise that too. ... We come first, but that's also because [lecturers] *have ownership of their teaching. So if you hear 'go and teach that subject, I want you to teach this, here are your lecture notes etc.' - that's never going to generate the same energy and passion in innovation as when you yourself are given that autonomy and the space to develop.*

Although lecturers tend to emphasise that they enjoy the individual responsibility they have for a course, there is also a contradiction within their ideas about good teaching. Lecturers say that to improve teaching sharing ideas and experiences is useful, and therefore *collaborating with colleagues for developing teaching* is needed. Moreover, cooperation with colleagues is necessary for constructive alignment in a curriculum. It is therefore remarkable that lecturers such as Eleonor on the one hand appreciate the individual character of teaching, but on the other hand believe that cooperation is needed for improvement.

> *Yes, of course you have to collaborate, because you have to exchange experiences and I think you have to develop the curriculum logically together - it should hang together.*

Furthermore, some lecturers report that they are willing to improve teaching, but do not have the time to do so. Heidi, for example, does not feel inhibited when it comes to developing education, and receives trust and freedom in this from her supervisor. However, this is not reflected in the time she gets for it. So, even if lecturers would like to make use of the freedom to further develop education programs, there is little or no time. The excerpt below shows that Heidi can have ideas and vision about the development of education, which counts as an indicator of agency in current study. However, it also shows that this cannot always be put into practice because no time is made available for it.

> *I do think that time is what is needed. When that obstacle is removed, so to speak, that space* [to develop] *is definitely there, so I am not hampered in any other way. I do think that you are stimulated - sometimes I think, well, here I come again, over-enthusiastic and with an idea, and then I was actually stimulated to take it further. So actually, it's mainly the time and capacity that is, so to speak, limited.*

Finally, we believe that educational development requires structural reflection, such as measuring whether certain teaching techniques or approaches are useful. None of the participants reported this type of structural reflection on or evaluation of their courses, but nearly half of the participants indicated that judgments

about the quality of a course are based primarily on student evaluations. For that reason, the indicator *discussing educational improvement with students* (Figure 2.1) was included.

2.3.3 Negotiating teacher identity

Although we focus on the lecturers' teaching practice in this study, we are aware that they have other duties besides teaching, such as conducting research. The answer to the question "why do you teach?" was largely twofold: either "it is part of my job description" or "I am a teacher; teaching gives me energy." Therefore, we included *reflecting on reasons to teach* to explore the extent to which the lecturer identifies with being a teacher.

As described in the introduction, agentic lecturers are prepared to develop both teaching and themselves along a career path. Therefore, *initiating professional development* was seen as an indicator of teacher agency. Several lecturers referred to the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) or Senior Teaching Qualification (STQ), authorized by the university as a way to engage in professional development. The UTQ is compulsory in the Netherlands for everyone teaching at a university. In this program, lecturers have to take a number of mandatory courses on, for example, educational design, constructive alignment, or assessment and feedback. In addition, they write a portfolio about their own development, which forces lecturers to take a stance in educational views. Therefore, *taking position in teaching discourse* was considered an indicator of professional development. Arthur gives an example of how the UTQ helped him to reflect on his own discourse and forced him to look at other possibilities in teaching:

> *The UTQ forces that a little. When I started the UTQ, I thought it was all nonsense. I do know how to teach, but when you do* [the UTQ]*, you discover things that you are forced to look at in other ways. That earlier you took for granted, so that's good.*

In addition, various refresher courses are offered regularly by the department and the university's education expertise center. Nicolas refers to this as his way of professional development as a teacher:

Yes, there are many courses you can go to. Lately I have not done that as much, but I used to go to all kinds of courses, and then I found it interesting to think about other ways of filling in my lessons. So that's a kind of development. I think it's a bit gradual and automatic.

A third way often mentioned in relation to professional development was reflecting on the lecture yourself. An example of professional development through reflection is given by Lola:

I am someone who always wants to be better, so that goes a bit automatically. Very often, when I travel back from work, I sit in the train, and I think, what didn't I do right? It's just that I don't always consciously think about next year; would I do it this way, would I do it differently next year? I write that down, it's my nature.

A fourth group that could be distinguished were lecturers who indicated that they had actually not done anything about professional development for a long time, but were forced to think again about their lessons due to the online teaching situation. Arthur argues that the adjustment to his teaching, forced by the pandemic, caused him to rethink his pedagogy:

I am now warmed up by this online situation due to Covid and use more digital means. I see a very big advantage of iPad lectures: the notes that you write during the lecture are just stored and you can make them available for the students and also for yourself. I would really like to go back to physical classes for the interaction. But I'm now also thinking of developing perhaps a hybrid form with a chalkboard and a screen, so that I can do things in the room with the iPad. And I hadn't actually thought of that before.

In conclusion, most lecturers indicated that they are no longer as consciously engaged in professional development as they were. This may be due to their years of teaching experience.

Negotiating professional identity also implies that professionals make choices to advance their own careers that match their future goals which is also

described by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019). Therefore, our interviews also covered career opportunities for lecturers, with an emphasis on teaching. What prevails in the answers is that excellent research is still more conducive to a career move than excellent teaching. *Considering career prospects* is therefore an indicator of *negotiating professional identity*. It seems that *valuing teaching* inhibits some in their ambitions to further develop teaching, to advance their careers they are better off focusing on bringing in projects and publications. On the other hand, it seems that teaching careers at universities are in motion and it is increasingly possible to make career moves as a teacher as well. An example within this university is the Teachers' Academy (TA), which offers grants to innovative educational proposals. Alicia is one of the TA fellows, and gives her view on career prospects and valuing teaching:

> *At this university* [higher recognition for lecturers on other skills than research] *is starting a bit now. It started with the educational leadership course, because we wanted to pay more attention to that. Something was set in motion with TA. I still don't think it's really beneficial for individual careers - although it is said that also with the STQ a movement was started. I think that if you want to get on within the university, so assistant or associate professor, it does not help to teach a lot or to teach innovatively. You will have to show excellent research. So the number of publications is very important.*

When asked about their views on teaching and learning, lecturers generally talked about education in terms of how it should be for the student, i.e., on a micro level. The following excerpt from Jack shows that he believes in educating students to become valuable employees, in addition to teaching content matter and communication skills. He strives to do this in a safe learning environment.

> Interviewer: *What do you see as your responsibility as a teacher?*
> Jack: *First of all, a safe climate for all pupils, safe and equal. I try to treat students as equally as possible. I think respectful treatment of students is necessary. A second part is in the skills I want to teach my students – to be constructively critical citizens. And so they must be able to think soundly and independently. Then of course I also want to teach them, so to speak, the content of the profession.*

That, of course, is another thing. And I want to teach them to communicate with the outside world. So, yes, in essence, they have to write a lot. Well, presentations too, the element of standing there and how the idea that you have can be put into words. Those are the most important components, I think.

Isabelle adds that her beliefs changed. She is concerned with the shift from transfer of knowledge toward facilitating student learning:

I've thought about it a lot and over the years I've changed my mind, because I've always found it very important to transfer knowledge. Recently I've come to think it's my job to have pupils work with the material in all kinds of ways and with different working methods ... So, they have to make their own assignments, they have to present lectures, they have to discuss with each other. I think it is actually very important to teach them a critical attitude to texts, to sources, and to collecting sources. I would actually like to impart knowledge to them as well, but I think it's more important that they know where to find that knowledge and how to use it critically. So I see it as my responsibility to facilitate their learning.

Some lecturers, such as Noemi, included in their response ideas about the purpose of education in a bigger picture, for example, educational development at institutional policy level. This then also takes into account the impact of their own teaching on that of their colleagues. So, it is not only about what happens in the classroom at that moment, but also about consequences for the future. Noemi argues:

I focus a lot on academic skills, but also on self-regulation skills, so they can plan well, that kind of thing. I also feel that I have responsibilities toward my colleagues. That means that if I teach my subject well and deliver the students well at the end of the semester, the colleague who teaches the subject after that can build on that. And above all, I must not increase the workload of my colleagues making them have to put things right. Again, workload is the big problem, so I have to make sure that how I function as a teacher also serves our organisation and what others do in their subjects.

In addition, Noemi states that although she is very aware of her role as teacher, it is necessary to set her *own limits within teaching*. She argues that there is room for a good deal of interaction with students during a lecture, but to protect herself, she limits it outside the course:

> *I'm not someone who's going to spend half an hour telling a story. There are always dialogues, but I also use a lot of game elements to make it all a bit more interactive and of course I have to play an active role in that. There is a limit. For me there is a clear limit as regards sending emails, knocking on doors and the like; to protect myself a little, I indicate my limits very clearly.*

2.4 Discussion

This paper focuses on understanding teacher agency in universities from the perspective of lecturers. The three components *influencing at work*, *developing work practices*, and *negotiating professional identity,* from the framework on generic professional agency used by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019), have been investigated in a university teaching practice. Although we succeeded in coding all relevant interview fragments to fit the three components of professional agency, there were also fragments in which more than one component could be found. In those cases, the authors decided in consultation what the core of the answer was and assigned the corresponding code. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that there can be overlap in a fragment, which indicates that it is not a one-component whole but dynamic. This could mean that the components are intertwined; thus, measuring the individual components gives a distorted or incomplete result. Despite this observation, we managed to give the components a specific framing in university teaching practice.

Our findings indicate that the three components can indeed be applied in this context, but the generic perspective does not yet do justice to the agency to be experienced in university teaching. For a more appropriate designation of our specific interpretation, the components *influencing university teaching, developing university teaching,* and *negotiating teacher identity* are introduced. An "emic",

context-specific approach should expose how lecturers in their role as teachers, with their knowledge and skills, take on their role as change agents.

2.4.1 Influencing university teaching

Although lecturers experienced having a great deal of influence, this did not extend beyond their own teaching. The degree of influence seemed to be determined by their formal position, and therefore we believe that a generic approach to agency does not do justice to teacher agency. The results from Vähäsantanen et al. (2020) support this view, as they found that the degree of perceived influence depends on academic position. Moreover, Annala et al. (2021) emphasize that not only position, but also professional level (i.e., university, community, and individual level) should be taken into consideration when agency is discussed. Comparable conclusions can also be drawn from our results. Lecturers indicated that they experienced having influence within their own courses (i.e., individual level) but hardly at community and university level. In our study we were not interested in formal positions but specifically in lecturers' teaching practice, because we wanted to investigate how lecturers, rather than formal educational leaders, perceived their role as educational change agents.

2.4.2 Developing university teaching

Lecturers did feel they contributed to the development of their teaching practices. For example, teachers indicated that they developed courses and evaluated these using student evaluation forms. Vähäsantanen and her colleagues (2020) also found that academics contributed greatly to the development of their own work practices. Again, a generic approach may give a distorted picture of teachers actually taking on their role as educational developers because, given our results, this development was mostly individual and did not go beyond course design. Edwards (2005) argues that in order to support educational development and constructive alignment within programs collaboration between colleagues should be fostered. Interestingly, the lecturers in our study agreed that educational development is best accomplished in collaboration with colleagues,

but indicated that they did not have time to participate in joint teaching and development activities. From our results it seems that collaboration in teaching among colleagues is not yet part of the university's teaching culture.

2.4.3 Negotiating teacher identity

Although lecturers indicated that they valued teaching, they did not feel professional development needs. Every lecturer in this study had completed the mandatory UTQ, but a structural program to develop as a lecturer is rare in this university. Participants thought that the low participation in professional development activities may be due to the lack of appreciation for good teaching. Still, according to Van Lankveld et al. (2016) participation in staff development programs is conducive to strengthening teacher identity, even for experienced lecturers. Indeed, a professional identity implies that professional obligations are aligned with beliefs and values, which can be expected to result in a high level of commitment to the work (Van Winkel et al., 2018).

Also, career prospects through teaching were rated lower than prospects through research. Lecturers felt that other tasks, such as research and valorisation, are considered more important than teaching, making investments in teaching and teacher development unattractive. In contrast, Vähäsantanen et al. (2020) indicate that academics were positive about their career prospects. The difference with our results may be that the participants in Vähäsantanen et al. (2020) talked about all aspects of their jobs, whereas our study focused on teaching.

2.4.4 Practical implications

It is beneficial to all stakeholders within a university if lecturers are able to show agentic behaviour beyond a single course, and take on their role as agents of change. For lecturers the main goal of promoting agency is not only to have skills and knowledge, but also to be able to assume their role as agents of change in educational practice. This requires teacher agency. Lecturers' perceptions about their agency as explored in this study have implications for the university work context. For the main issues, where there is still room for improvement given our results, there are the following practical implications: 1) influence on

departmental level; 2) collaboration with colleagues; 3) emphasis on developing an identity as a teacher. 4) finally, we hold the results against the international university context.

First, if lecturers want to have a say at the departmental level, we recommend participating in educational development projects and collecting data in order to expose problems. Examples of ways to collect data include mid-term evaluations, questionnaires to evaluate the use of a specific pedagogy (e.g., hybrid learning), and regular student evaluations at the end of a course. For even deeper insights into students' learning, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning could be implemented. In this way, lecturers can suggest educational developments justified by their own data. Managers should take the suggestions seriously and feed these back to the teaching staff. In this way everyone feels heard and involved in policies that are broader than just their own practice.

Second, lecturers should be given time to collaborate with colleagues on educational development, because this would lead to a greater sense of teacher agency. For example, as Tigelaar et al. (2006) argue, reviewing lessons together with colleagues is a constructive way to implement or propose valuable developments. What emerged from some of the interviews in our study is that lecturers appreciated the fact that because of the Covid pandemic and online teaching lecturers were joining forces to create courses together. This cooperation could be a lasting change in departments. Developing lessons together – even beyond courses – contributes to ownership, innovation, and constructive alignment. This collaboration could be organized, for example, in a community of learners with a group of lecturers working collectively to solve a common research question or problem.

Third, lecturers who identify with their role as a teacher are emotionally attached to teaching, and are committed to this role (Van Lankveld et al., 2016). To further develop teacher identity, it is important that lecturers continue to work on their professional development. Staff professional development can ensure that lecturers develop a pedagogical language that gives them a sense of credibility and authority as experts within their department (Van Lankveld et al., 2016). Taking courses offered by the university is a good example, because

a teacher identity develops by interpreting and re-interpretating the type of teacher one wants to be (Van Lankveld et al., 2016). Teacher trainers can help to provide educational principles that lecturers can use and make their own. Additionally, educational leaders must recognize how lecturers experience the professional development they rely on to implement national and local reforms, and providing lecturers with rich, creative learning experiences that lead to mastery (Brodie, 2019).

Finally, our results have implications for universities globally. The context of the current study was a research-intensive university in the Netherlands. Lecturers face a delicate balance between teaching and research in the Netherlands and worldwide. Lecturers are expected to excel in research and adapt their teaching to a rapidly changing society, as well as to meet the demands of international students (Taylor, 2004). This requires lecturers to take charge of their teaching practice, further develop it, and ensure their own professional development. These lecturers continually develop themselves as teachers, are willing and able to innovate their teaching, and are empowered to adopt or reject policies. The findings of this study offer insight into how teacher agency can be examined in universities to understand how lecturers can influence and develop their work practices.

2.4.5 Limitations and future research

Overall, our study aimed to gain insight into perceptions of lecturers' professional teacher agency in university, and some limitations should be mentioned here. In the current study, lecturers were interviewed once. This means that their perceptions might be influenced by events or experiences that occurred just before the interview. More interviews per lecturer can give a more stable picture of their perceptions. In addition, no data have been collected about how these perceptions manifest in teacher practice. Follow-up research could include more data sources to further insights into agency in teaching practice.

Furthermore, the findings of our study may have limited generalizability because of convenience sampling, which may have resulted in participants with relatively positive attitudes toward teaching. Nevertheless, we used convenience

sampling because we wanted to have rich descriptions of how teachers in higher education perceive their teaching practice.

Another limitation of this study is the underrepresentation of early-career lecturers. Although Vähäsantanen et al. (2020) found no effect of age in their questionnaire study, we still see reasons to believe that long teaching experience is associated with higher feelings of teacher agency, feelings partly based on the development of teacher agency through previous professional experiences (Priestley et al., 2015). Thus, the degree of agency in our sample may be overestimated. Beginning lecturers might lack agency because they feel overwhelmed by the workload and feel little support from the environment (Adams & Rytmeister, 2001; Remmik et al., 2011). Therefore, future research could address the development of teacher agency through different career stages. Finally, this study took place within one research university. Therefore, our results should be interpreted with caution as results for other universities may be different. A follow-up study could consider doing measurements at different universities to determine whether organizational structures are impeding or promoting teacher agency.

2.5 Concluding remarks

This paper focuses on the teaching aspect of professional agency, exploring its characteristics in lecturers describing their teaching practice. Through qualitative interview data we investigated teacher agency in relation to lecturers, and how this can be characterized. The study contributes to our understanding of teacher agency. Now that we have directions on how the three components of professional agency are expressed in university teaching practice, our understanding of this concept has increased. These results add to the growing body of research indicating that it is becoming possible to recognize teacher agency and provide a more detailed understanding of the three components of professional agency of specific interpretation in university teaching practice. Thanks to a relatively large sample of lecturers from seven departments, the use of a validated framework, and intensive consultation among the authors, we were able to propose implications for how to support lecturers in developing as educational change agents.

Chapter 3

Developing Scenarios for Exploring Teacher Agency in Universities: A Multimethod Study

This chapter was published in an adapted form as:
Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Admiraal, W., & Van der Rijst, R. (2024). Developing scenarios for exploring teacher agency in universities: A multimethod study. *Frontline Learning Research*, 12(2), 1–26.
https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v12i2.1419

Abstract

Lecturers who are actively engaged in shaping their teaching and teaching practices demonstrate agency. Teacher agency has increasingly been described as a key factor in educational development at universities. Lecturers are expected to innovatively develop courses and continuously improve their teaching practices to respond to, for example, student needs and labor market demands. In this multimethod study, we examined the process of developing and validating scenarios for measuring teacher agency in universities. We conducted four studies to create 23 scenarios that capture the complex nature of teacher agency. First, we interviewed university lecturers to identify bumpy moments in their teaching practice, and so found scenarios based on real-life experiences. Then, we employed two expert panels, to evaluate and refine the scenarios, which enhanced their validity. Finally, we used a pilot study to standardize the data collection procedures. Our multimethod study has established reliability by triangulating methods and researchers, involving multiple stakeholders, and providing detailed descriptions of the research process. This project holds implications for research and practice. The scenarios can be used in professional academic development programs for the collection of research data and to promote self-reflection, peer consultation activities, and professional growth and agency among university lecturers.

3.1 Introduction

The importance of teacher agency for effective teaching practices has long been recognized (Aspbury-Miyanishi, 2022; Priestley et al., 2012; Pyhältö et al., 2013). Although most research on teacher agency relates to primary and secondary education (Cong-Lem, 2021), in recent years it has also become clear that teacher agency has a critical impact on teaching and learning at universities (Kusters et al., 2023; Vähäsantanen et al., 2020). At its core, teacher agency implies that lecturers shape their responsiveness to problematic situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). In an ecological approach, teacher agency entails that this "responsiveness" is informed by lecturers' professional histories, oriented toward future objectives and aspirations, and enactment in concrete situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015). It is both constrained and supported by relational, structural, and material resources available to actors (Priestley et al., 2015).

Teacher agency is required when situations call for a considered solution. This means that a solution may not be imminent, but more options could work; it requires agency to consider which option is best given the broader purpose of the practice in which they work (Leijen et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2015). Teacher agency is therefore not seen as static, but rather as a dynamic and context-dependent concept (Jenkins, 2019; Kusters et al., 2023), which constantly changes in response to various factors, such as educational environments, policy changes, and personal beliefs, values, and goals. It evolves in and adapts to the existing context (Biesta et al., 2015). This ongoing evolution and adaptation to contexts (or: *temporality*) raise significant concerns regarding the accurate methodologies to measure teacher agency.

Developing a tool for measuring teacher agency, therefore, brings challenges such as being able to do justice to the dynamic character and temporality that teacher agency entails. Previous methodologies, despite their utility, have demonstrated shortcomings in adequately addressing these aspects. To illustrate, teacher agency can be measured through self-report tools (Ghiasvand et al., 2023; Leijen et al., 2021; Vähäsantanen et al., 2019) as well as classroom observation

methods (Hiver & Whitehead, 2018). Questionnaires measuring self-reported agency have the disadvantage of lacking context, and therefore not capturing aspects of considerations about participants' responses to the items. Although classroom observations provide valuable insights about actual behavior in a real-life context, they often take up time and resources and cannot capture the full scope of teacher agency in different, multiple contexts. Moreover, lecturers' reflections cannot be collected by mere observation, which means additional data collection is needed.

Alternatively, methodologies focused on utilizing real-life stimuli are suitable to effectively incorporate context at a given time. Because of our goal to develop scenario-based research that focuses on eliciting teacher agency, our methodological approach is based on the results observed in research using real-life stimuli (for examples see Sannino & Engeström, 2016; Yang, 2021, 2022). Recognizing the effectiveness of such studies, there is a need for tools that provide real-life teaching experiences to measure teacher agency in universities. To that end, we developed scenarios (i.e., short descriptions of situations that demand teacher agency) based on real-life teaching experiences at universities. In this project, we aim to present scenarios, developed in a trustworthy way and shaping internally valid conditions for measuring teacher agency in universities.

3.1.1 Defining Teacher Agency

Teacher agency within an ecological approach arises from the intricate interplay between individuals' abilities and environmental conditions. This underscores the importance of an instrument that not only measures lecturers' abilities but also elements from the past, future, and available resources in the present that affect the specific ecologies in which lecturers work (Priestley et al., 2015). Approaching teacher agency from an ecological perspective also recognizes agency's fluidity over time.

Given the conditions under which agency emerges and the implications for measuring teacher agency, the challenge is to address the context in which lecturers work (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Universities provide a diverse range

of environments, with their own educational beliefs and values for lecturers (Gibson, 1986). Real-life teaching scenarios allow the exploration of teacher agency in various contexts and leave room for considerations (e.g., which affordances are perceived and/or why one solution is preferred over another) in the decision-making process. To understand lecturers' perceived affordances and considerations we have tried to represent real-life teaching situations through written scenarios.

3.1.2 Scenario definition and purpose

In methodological contexts, *scenarios* are descriptive representations of specific situations designed to simulate real events or problems (Hughes & Huby, 2004; Jeffries & Maeder, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2010). Scenarios can have different forms, such as image, video, audio, or written narrative, which research participants are requested to comment on (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Written scenarios are most effective when they range from 50 to 200 words (Jeffries & Maeder, 2005). They can revolve around people, situations, or events. Finch (1987) highlights the importance of employing scenarios in research in order to thoroughly investigate the central phenomenon under examination. By eliciting responses and encouraging discussion valuable information is gathered, providing insight into participants' beliefs, values, judgments, and attitudes. Scenarios are also valuable tools for gathering in-depth insights into participants' nuanced thoughts on varying topics (Simon & Tierney, 2011). Although in the literature the term *vignette* is often used (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020), we here intentionally use the term *scenario*. Vignettes evoke the idea of a snapshot or static image of a situation, but our goal in constructing the scenarios was to represent vivid, authentic situations.

Research on teacher agency is suited to a scenario study, because context-specific scenarios fit the context-dependent nature of teacher agency. They provide a powerful tool to explore and understand how lecturers demonstrate agency within different university teaching practices, and this approach ultimately contributes to better informed and contextually relevant educational policies and practices. The main consideration when developing compelling scenarios

is whether they genuinely reflect the complex and varied educational learning situations that lecturers encounter in their professional roles (Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018). This type of study also prompts an examination of the reliability of the responses and decisions derived from these scenarios (Gould, 1996) as indicators of teacher agency among lecturers.

3.1.3 Aim of the project

The aim of the current project, consisting of four studies, was to develop and test a real-life instrument to measure teacher agency from an ecological perspective. As Rushton & Bird (2024) pointed out, elements of teacher agency are nonlinearly intertwined and thus do not act in isolation but rather interact with each other in situations, which led us to provide context-rich descriptions of situations for measuring agency. This type of research emphasizes the collection of in-depth, contextual data through methods to understand the complex and dynamic nature of human behavior, interactions, and structures within specific social and cultural contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In this methodological paper, we report on the development of scenarios by which to capture the dynamic nature of teacher agency. The essential challenge for the current project here lies in ensuring that the scenario content accurately represents real-life teaching situations, particularly in terms of internal validity, an aspect that has often been overlooked in prior scenario-based research (Hughes & Huby, 2004). To address this challenge, we relied on a framework that contains the critical elements needed for comprehensive scenario development introduced by Skilling and Stylianides (2020). The three key elements include the *conception* of the content, *design* of the scenarios, and *administration* of the protocol (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Moreover, in the design of the four studies we aimed for maximum trustworthiness of the research process. To that end we used four critical criteria as discussed by Guba (1981): *credibility* refers to the believability of the research findings; *dependability* is the consistency and stability of the research findings over time and in different circumstances; *confirmability* relates to the objectivity and neutrality of the research, ensuring that the researcher's biases or perspectives do not influence findings; and finally,

transformability relates to the extent to which qualitative research findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts or settings. To best meet the above criteria, we had to consider which themes of the scenarios are of interest to university lecturers, which writing format contributes most to recognition of the scenarios for participants, how experts assessed the quality of the scenarios, and which scenarios can best be used to make teacher agency measurable.

To this end, in the inductive phase of this research we collected specific observations and data by which to identify general patterns and theories. Subsequently, in the deductive phase we tested the scenarios empirically.

This paper is structured around four separate but interconnected studies (Figure 3.1). These studies were intended together to contribute to answering the overarching research question: *In what ways can representative scenarios be developed to measure teacher agency in universities?*

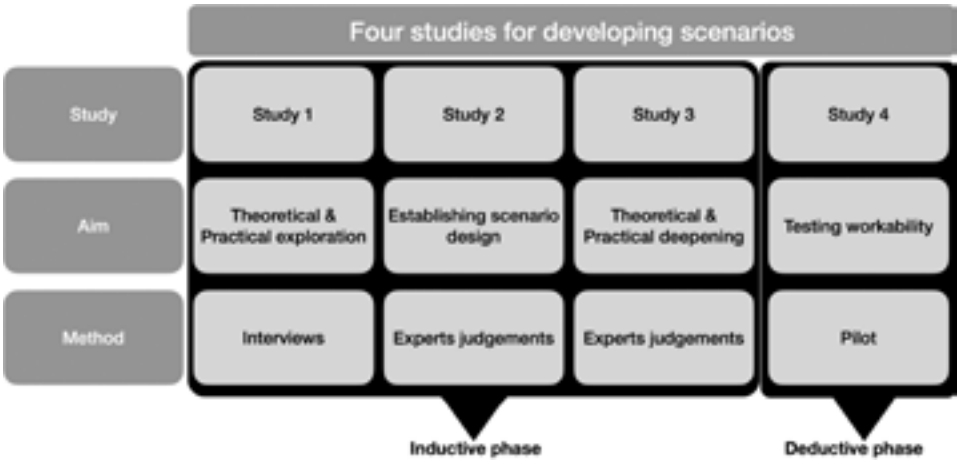

Figure 3.1

Four Studies for Developing Scenarios

The following sub-questions for each study were addressed:

Study 1: Which teaching scenario themes are representative of university teaching?

Study 2: Should valid scenarios for teacher agency be written in the first- or third-person perspective, and in open-ended or closed-ended format?

Study 3: How do experts evaluate the likelihood of specific scenarios actually eliciting teacher agency?

Study 4: To what extent do lecturers prefer particular scenarios, and which scenarios are useful for eliciting multiple solutions?

The first three studies were intended to construct the scenarios inductively, attempting to do justice to the key elements of *conception* and *design* (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). In Study 1, interviews were conducted to determine the themes and content of the scenarios. In Study 2 and Study 3, expert panels determined writing style and perspective and the alignment of content with the research goal, respectively. Study 4 was a deductive pilot study intended to test the scenarios on lecturers, and this aim corresponded to the key element of *administration* (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020).

Below, we present the four studies. The institute's ethical review committee (ICLON-IREC 2021-02) gave approval for our research. In addition, participants

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Participants and Occupational Status

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Total
N	28	37	13	30	108
Nationality					
• Dutch	23	26	10	26	85
• Norwegian	3	0	1	0	4
• Finnish	2	0	1	0	3
• Other	0	11	1	4	16
Gender					
• Female	13	28	9	17	67
• Male	15	9	4	13	41
University Position	7	1	9	9	12*
• PhD candidate	0	22	2	0	24
• Lecturer	27	12	6	24	69
• Professor	1	3	5	6	15

**Note.* Participants came from 12 different universities in total. There is overlap between the universities used in the different studies.

provided consent for each study. Participants consisted of PhD candidates, post-doctoral fellows, assistants, associates, and full professors. Any names displayed are fictitious so as to ensure participants' privacy. The four studies all had different participants. Table 3.1 lists the participants in each study.

3.2 Study 1

Study 1 focused on identifying key themes in which the complexity of teaching practice calls for agentic manifestations. To accomplish this, we conducted interviews with lecturers. The central question in Study 1 was: *Which teaching scenario themes are representative of university teaching?*

3.2.1 Method

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 28 lecturers from seven research-intensive universities in the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland (Table 3.1). To obtain a representative sample of the population, lecturers from various domains were approached via a brief introductory email explaining the purpose of the project. Later they received a letter with more information, also on the procedure of the project, along with an agreement to participate for them to sign. The authors recruited the lecturers through their professional networks, aiming to investigate *bumpy moments* for lecturers with both teaching and research duties. Only lecturers with a PhD were included because we wanted to exclude casual teaching staff, often hired temporarily for teaching assignments only. All participants had explicit teaching duties in their employment contracts along with their research tasks. They all had more than five years of teaching experience, teaching in small-group settings as well as giving lectures. During the interviews, participants were specifically asked about teaching context, i.e., working group or lecture.

Data collection

Data collection consisted of online interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, with participants able to choose between English or Dutch as their preferred language of communication. In the interviews, participants were asked to recall situations from their teaching practice in which they had to make decisions: "Could you please indicate those moments when you acted in a particular way, and with hindsight feel that you could just as well have acted differently?" The term *bumpy moment* (Romano, 2006; Van Kan et al., 2010) was employed to describe these challenging and dilemma-laden situations. The *bumpy moment* did not refer to a situation in which teachers did not know what to do ("incapacity to act") but to a situation that could, with hindsight, have provided several legitimate and competing courses of action. All interviews were recorded, allowing for later reviewing and in-depth analysis. Each interview was transcribed verbatim for data analysis and coding.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of real-life teaching situations in the university context, participants were requested to contemplate their *bumpy moments* before the interview. They were asked to share at least two of these moments and supply brief descriptions, which helped the interviewer to prepare properly. In cases when participants did not provide their *bumpy moments* in advance, they were given some time to compile and identify specific incidents for discussion. Throughout the interview, the interviewer asked questions in order to clarify and delve deeper into the details of each moment, including circumstances, people involved, location, and underlying considerations. This approach made it easier to collect a diverse and extensive range of themes, thus providing deeper insights as a basis for developing scenario storylines.

Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed by the principal investigator using Atlas.ti, and following a systematic approach to ensure a comprehensive examination. Interim and final results were discussed in consultation with the other authors. Initially, the researchers selected all relevant parts of the transcripts on the basis of the guiding questions, i.e., whether there was room

for choices within the given scenario and whether it was possible for a teacher to change the situation. Having multiple options to act in teaching settings is a prerequisite given the definition of the ecological approach (Priestley et al., 2015). Interview fragments that met both criteria were then selected for further study using thematic content analysis (Silverman, 2006). Overarching themes were created using all the relevant fragments; the *bumpy moments* could then be subdivided according to these themes.

3.2.2 Findings

The interviews were intended to uncover the topics on which scenarios needed to be based. Each interviewee came up with an average of 2.6 *bumpy moments,* which resulted in 74 *bumpy moments* in total. The following fragment illustrates a code concerning "student preparation."

James stated:

> *The question is always: should you assume that students have done the preparation that you have actually prescribed for them? And does that mean that you then stick to that or that the moment you find out, that that preparation hasn't taken place sufficiently, that you then adjust on the spot and go back to what they should have studied? And that's always a trade-off. Always the choice of flexibility on the one hand, on the other hand adapting to the information needs of the student, for which of course there is also a lot to be said. But then with that you send the signal: it's okay not to be prepared, because they're starting back at the beginning anyway. Important choice you keep running into.*

In this phase, we tried to list the content, context, and recurring themes in the data. Overarching content and similar elements (e.g., other fragments about "student preparation," similar to the example above) found in multiple fragments formed the basis for the subsequent coding process. In this case, 24 codes were generated based on the overarching and similar content identified. Although some codes occurred more frequently than others (see Appendix A), each code served as a theme.

To sum up, in Study 1 we examined how to develop scenarios that reflected

a realistic representation of teaching practice at universities. We chose an emic perspective to understand *bumpy moments* from the point of view of university lecturers in the field. We interviewed professionals in the field to get a realistic representation of the *bumpy moments* experienced by lecturers. This first part of our research provided valuable insights into the complexity of teaching practice at universities. Through interviews and qualitative thematic content analysis we discovered a diverse array of 24 different themes on which to focus the scenarios.

3.3 Study 2

Building on the insights from the first study, Study 2 focused on the question of narrative perspective and design of the scenarios. The goal was to ensure that the scenarios were structured and written in a way that contributed to the lecturers' identification with the scenario. The literature does not provide a theoretical basis for determining these fundamental design principles (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). First, we had to decide whether the scenarios should be written from a first- or third-person perspective. Second, as Skilling and Stylianides (2020) note in their framework, researchers must determine whether scenarios have an open or closed ending, depending on the goal. Therefore, in Study 2, we also determined the appropriate endings for the scenarios based on the research aims, as our objective was to accurately reflect real-life teaching practice within the scenarios. The guiding question here was: *Should valid scenarios for teacher agency be written from a first- or third-person perspective, and in an open-ended or closed-ended format?*

3.3.1 Method

Participants

In Study 2, 37 researchers with backgrounds in educational science, ranging from PhD candidates to full professors, participated as an expert panel (Table 3.1). All panel members had varying experiences with quantitative and qualitative research methods and were given information by the first author during a research group meeting. Participants were aware that participation in the panel was voluntary.

Data collection

For Study 2 and Study 3 we used *comparative judgement* (CJ). CJ has been proposed as an assessment technique that can produce consistent results (Pollitt, 2012). The CJ method relies on comparisons rather than absolute judgements. For this, panelists are shown pairs of draft scenarios, also called *appearances*, and asked to decide which of the two best suited to the topic being assessed. Researchers can then derive a scale value from these assessments. Using multiple assessors helps reduce individual bias and contributes to a more balanced and objective assessment. For this purpose, we used the Comproved software (see https://comproved.com/en/comparing-tool/) to rank panelists' judgements, by comparing two scenarios at a time and judging which one best fit the leading question. CJ is based on the Bradley-Terry-Luce model (BTL model; Bradley & Terry, 1952; Luce, 1959), a statistical model that provides a framework for analyzing CJ data. The model assumes that each item (draft scenario) has an underlying latent quality or preference score, and that the probability of choosing one item over another depends on the difference between their scores. The BTL model is formulated as follows:

$$p\left(x_{ij} = 1 \mid v_i, v_j\right) = \frac{e^{\left(v_j - v_i\right)}}{1 + e^{\left(v_j - v_i\right)}},$$

where $x_{ij} = 1$ if appearance j is assumed to be superior to appearance i, and v_i and v_j are the estimated ability values, in logit scores, of the respective appearances (Verhavert et al., 2018).

The Comproved tool uses multiple assessors to rank scenarios according to certain evaluation criteria. Each assessor gets to see the same set of scenarios but in different and randomized combinations. In the end the tool consolidates all input received. The result is a quality scale ranking the scenarios, with their corresponding ability scores, in order of preference. The reliability of the scale is expressed in the Scale Separation Reliability (SSR), where SSR serves as a measure of the internal consistency of the assessment results. A study by Verhavert et al. (2018) has demonstrated that the SSR can be used to estimate both inter-rater reliability and split-half reliability.

For Study 2, we selected the four most common themes from the 24 resulting from Study 1, and wrote four scenarios based on these themes. We used these to determine the best perspective for each scenario, and whether it should have an open- or closed-ending format. An open ending means that the scenario ends with: "So I knew I had to come up with a solution." A closed ending means that a solution was already given in the scenario. Each of the four scenarios was presented in four different ways: 1) first-person perspective with an open ending; 2) first-person perspective with closed ending; 3) third-person perspective with an open ending; and 4) third-person perspective with closed ending (for an example, see Appendix B). Thus, the dataset contained 16 documents (draft scenarios) in all. In Comproved two randomly selected draft scenarios were presented each time, from which the participant was asked to choose the one they were best able to identify with. Participants also indicated *why* they preferred one scenario over another, which allowed us to collect qualitative data and so gain insight into the participants' considerations. Participants made four comparisons per person (Verhavert et al., 2019), resulting in an SSR of .59, which can be considered low. Comproved also showed "misfit judges," i.e., assessors that diverged from the average. In this dataset three misfit judges were detected. By deleting these three assessors, we reached an acceptable SSR of .70. However, although with this modification slight changes in the ranking occurred, the main result did not change. Therefore, we decided to retain the misfit judges because their answers to the open questions gave valuable insights into the reasons behind their choices.

Analysis

The analysis focused on distinguishing the different forms, aimed at being able to empathize with the scenario. The most popular appearance form (i.e., the scenarios most likely to be selected as favorites) was included in the next study. The additional qualitative data explained why participants identified better with one form over the other.

Table 3.2

Ranking of Scenarios

Rank	Scenario	Perspective	Closing
1	F	1st perspective	Open
2	I	1st perspective	Closed
3	N	1st perspective	Open
4	E	1st perspective	Closed
5	J	1st perspective	Open
6	B	1st perspective	Open
7	M	1st perspective	Closed
8	O	3rd perspective	Closed
9	P	3rd perspective	Open
10	K	3rd perspective	Closed
11	G	3rd perspective	Closed
12	L	3rd perspective	Open
13	D	3rd perspective	Open
14	C	3rd perspective	Closed
15	H	3rd perspective	Open
16	A	1st perspective	Closed

Note. No. of assessors: $n = 37$

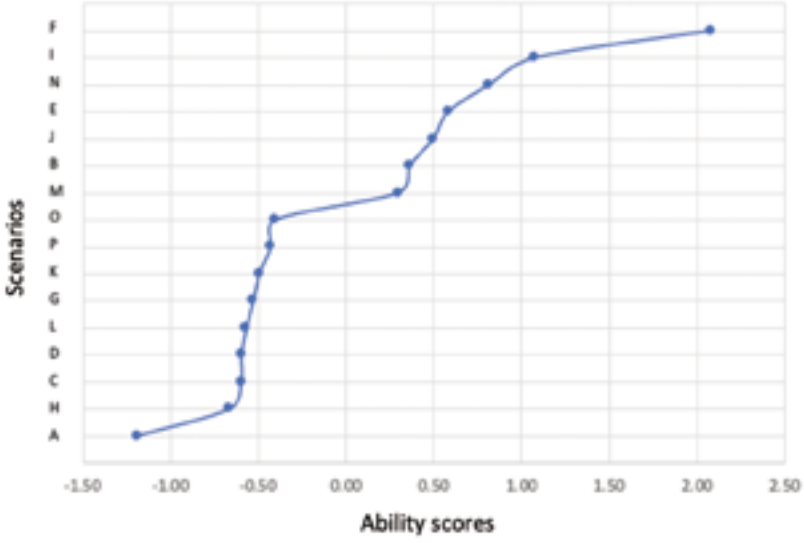

Figure 3.2

Study 2: Ranking on the Basis of Ability Scores

3.3.2 Findings

Four scenarios were presented to the panel (n = 37) in four forms. In each case the panelists were asked to choose which of two scenarios they most identified with as participants. From this, we constructed a ranking (Table 3.2).

The graph for the rankings (Figure 3.2) shows the extent to which a particular scenario is likely to win over another scenario. The results indicate that the top seven scenarios were all written in the first-person perspective. Although the ranking regarding the closings of the scenarios was less clear, the qualitative data were compelling – they indicated that an open-ended scenario, i.e., one without a given solution, worked best to promote recognizability. It turned out that if a solution was given, panelists began to evaluate the solution instead of the rest of the scenario, and thought about whether they could identify with the solution rather than with the *bumpy moment.* Emma, for instance, mentioned the following:

> *The solution given is totally improbable, something I would never go for. So, I do not identify with this.*

We attribute the fact that scenario A, ranked 16th, was written in the first person but finished last to the implausibility of the solution described. The qualitative data showed that panelists rarely chose this scenario because of its improbably worded ending. The content of this scenario is the same as scenario C which finished 14th.

To sum up, in Study 2, educational researchers were involved in a panel to determine the ideal perspectives and endings of the scenarios. Once we learned how best to write the scenarios in view of the main goal of recognizability, we were able to use experts in our research field to assess the content of the scenarios in Study 3.

3.4 Study 3

After the most appropriate perspectives and closings for the scenarios had been established, the third study then involved asking participants to rank the

scenarios with respect to their purpose of eliciting teacher agency. For Study 3, all 24 themes were developed into scenarios written from the first-person perspective and with open endings. The central question underlying this third study was: *How do experts evaluate the likelihood of specific scenarios actually eliciting teacher agency?*

3.4.1 Method

Participants

In Study 3, an expert panel consisting of 13 educationalists specializing in teacher agency and/or higher education was assembled (Table 3.1). The panelists were selected from the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, and Hungary. The composition of the panel was expressly intended to focus on expertise and perspectives relevant to research on teacher agency manifestations in universities.

Data collection

As in Study 2, we used CJ to determine the content of the scenarios. The panel was presented with all 24 first-person, open-ended scenarios, requiring the experts to make the comparisons in the same way as the participants in the second study. As in Study 2, experts were also asked to explain why they preferred one scenario over another. These qualitative data played a central role in Study 3. Rather than relying solely on quantitative measures or numerical rankings, we sought to capture the nuanced perspectives and reasoning behind the experts' choices. The assignment for the panelists was to choose which of two scenarios was best for eliciting manifestations of teacher agency, based on the following definition by Priestley et al. (2015):

> "(…) *teachers achieve agency when they are able to choose between different options in any given situation and are able to judge which option is most desirable in light of the wider purposes of the practice in and through which they act. (…) Agency is not present if there are no options for actions or if the teacher simply follows routinized patterns of habitual behavior with no consideration of alternatives."* (p. 141)

In this case, the participants made 20 comparisons per person because there were more scenarios and fewer assessors than in Study 2 (Verhavert et al., 2019). The SSR in this dataset was .70.

Analysis

Panelists chose which of two scenarios they thought most appropriate for eliciting teacher agency and so indicated why one scenario they considered more suitable than the other. The main idea was to find the most appropriate scenario of two by comparing the chances of success or a favorable outcome. A positive score (above 0) suggests a likelihood of success greater than 50%, meaning that one scenario is more likely to be successful than the other. Conversely, a score below 0 indicates a likelihood of success lower than 50%, making the scenario less likely to succeed than the other. The greater the deviation from 0, whether positive or negative, the stronger the indication of success or failure in the scenario. Additionally, we analyzed the qualitative data to uncover why certain scenarios were favored over others. In the analysis of the open answers, we compared the views of different experts on the suitability of the scenarios to elicit teacher agency, focusing on similarities and contradictions. This approach provided insight into the diversity of opinions. The information gathered was used to create a comprehensive synthesis of the experts' key points and conclusions, leading to a better understanding of why scenarios are suitable for eliciting teacher agency.

3.4.2 Findings

The ranking resulting from the analyses (Figure 3.3) shows the ability score, indicating which scenario is most likely to win over another scenario.

The ability scores (also converted to odds and probability scores, see Table 3.3) show only slight variations. In particular, Figure 3.3 shows that the ability scores of scenarios 4 through 21 (inside the green rectangle in Table 3.3) were relatively close to each other, implying that the likelihood of eliciting teacher agency from these scenarios was nearly equal, i.e., the scenarios tested have similar qualities.
The qualitative data provided insight into how the scenarios could be improved,

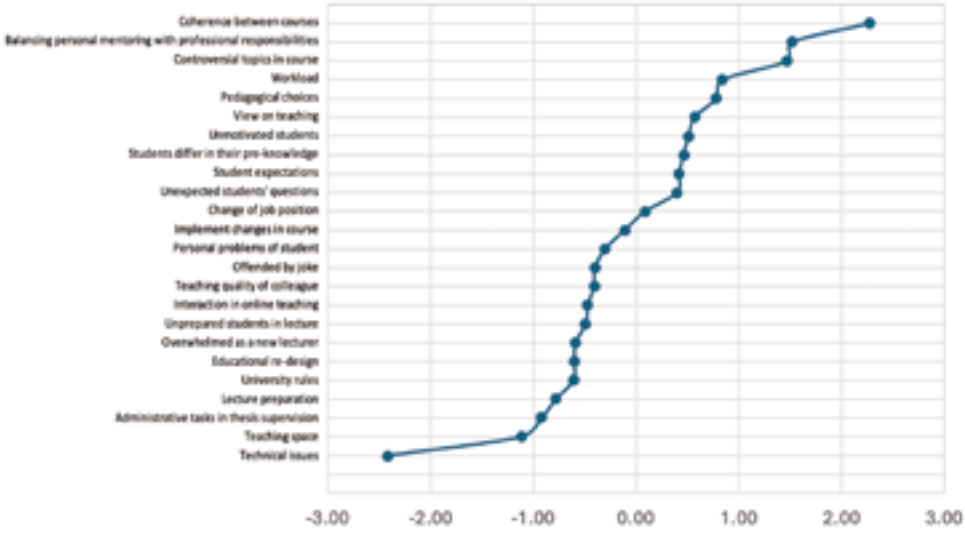

Figure 3.3

Study 3: Ranking on the Basis of Ability Scores

for instance, the importance of a clear description of the *bumpy moment*. To illustrate, one of the panelists said:

> *The person appreciates the freedom – that seems to be the most important part – "Sometimes it feels that everyone is working on their own island." According to this formulation, this seems to be only a minor problem.*

This panelist indicated that the *bumpy moment* "lecturers are working on their own island" could be phrased more sharply. In this way we were able to tighten up several scenarios that, as evidenced by the experts' responses, sometimes did not adequately reflect the *bumpy moment*. Panelists were unanimous only in the case of the *Teaching space* scenario; as became clear from their explanations regarding the open-ended questions, this scenario did not elicit teacher agency. For this reason, we eliminated it. For the remaining 23 scenarios, the experts gave arguments as to why one scenario was superior to the other. We used the qualitative data to further sharpen up some of the scenarios; in two cases, we specified the *bumpy moment* more clearly and in two cases we modified the title. The final 23 scenarios can be found in Appendix C.

Table 3.3

Ability, Odds, and Probability Scores

Rank	Scenario	Ability (logit)	Odds	Probability
1	Coherence between courses	2.27	9.7	0.91
2	Balancing professional responsibilities	1.52	4.6	0.82
3	Controversial topics in course	1.47	4.3	0.81
4	Workload	0.84	2.3	0.70
5	Pedagogical choices	0.78	2.2	0.69
6	View on teaching	0.57	1.8	0.64
7	Unmotivated students	0.51	1.7	0.62
8	Students differ in their pre-knowledge	0.46	1.6	0.61
9	Student expectations	0.42	1.5	0.60
10	Students' unexpected questions	0.40	1.5	0.60
11	Change of job position	0.09	1.1	0.52
12	Implement changes in course	-0.11	0.9	0.47
13	Personal problems of student	-0.30	0.7	0.43
14	Offended by joke	-0.40	0.7	0.40
15	Teaching quality of colleague	-0.41	0.7	0.40
16	Interaction in online teaching	-0.47	0.6	0.38
17	Unprepared students in lecture	-0.49	0.6	0.38
18	Overwhelmed as a new lecturer	-0.59	0.6	0.36
19	Educational re-design	-0.60	0.5	0.35
20	University rules	-0.61	0.5	0.35
21	Lecture preparation	-0.78	0.5	0.32
22	Administrative tasks in thesis supervision	-0.92	0.4	0.28
23	Teaching space	-1.12	0.3	0.25
24	Technical issues	-2.42	0.1	0.08

To sum up, Study 3 was designed to shed light on expert opinions and the factors influencing their judgements on the potential of scenarios to elicit teacher agency. The combination of the rating system and qualitative data collection allowed for a robust exploration of the expert opinions, ultimately contributing to a more complete understanding of the research question. In particular, the

qualitative data provided insight into the reasons why participants believed certain scenarios were appropriate. We were also able to use the input from the data to modify scenarios if, for example, it appeared that the *bumpy moment* was unclear, the wording was not exact enough, or the title did not seem to cover the main message. This validation method resulted in 23 scenarios, which we tested in a pilot study.

3.5 Study 4

Finally, Study 4 was a pilot study deductively testing the scenarios created in the inductive phase. The primary focus here was to obtain insight into which scenarios resonated most with actual participants, and to determine the operational feasibility and usability of these scenarios for research purposes. A scenario must, first, be recognizable to a participant, and second, elicit multiple solutions if it is to be an effective tool for providing a differentiated indication of teacher agency. This criterion corresponds with the definition of teacher agency, which states that lecturers can choose between different options in a situation and can assess which option is the most desirable (Priestley et al., 2015). In this fourth study we tested the scenario set using two quality criteria: which scenarios participants prefer, and whether scenarios elicit multiple responses. The central question in Study 4 was: *To what extent do lecturers prefer particular scenarios, and which scenarios are useful for eliciting multiple solutions?*

3.5.1 Method

To examine the usability of the scenarios, think-aloud sessions were needed to reveal whether participants were able to devise multiple solutions, thus indicating teacher agency. If for a specific scenario participants came up with multiple solutions, we assumed that the answer to that scenario was not obvious. Non-obviousness is a prerequisite for an effective scenario, because teacher agency can only be achieved if there are multiple options for action (Priestley et al., 2015).

Participants

The think-aloud sessions were conducted with 30 lecturers from 9 research-intensive universities in the Netherlands. These were tenured lecturers with PhD degrees. Their roles involved both teaching and research responsibilities. They were responsible for at least delivering lectures or instructional sessions to students and engaged in research activities. All lecturers had more than five years of university teaching experience.

Data collection

Data were collected in two stages. First, prior to the think-aloud sessions, participants were asked to select five scenarios they wanted to address based on recognizability. Participants received the 23 scenarios in random order to avoid order bias, prior to the sessions. We then collected the participants' selections. Second, during the think-aloud sessions, the lecturers were asked questions about possible solutions to a specific scenario and corresponding considerations. Each session, monitored on site by the principal investigator, lasted a maximum of 60 minutes, in which an average of 3.3 scenarios could be covered. Participants received the scenarios printed out and laminated on an A6 sheet. The participant read one of the chosen scenarios aloud, each scenario ending with the phrase, "So I knew I had to come up with a solution." At that point the thinking aloud began, in which the participant had to think of possible solutions to address this scenario. The researcher only asked clarifying questions about whether other solutions were conceivable. When no further solutions were found, a new scenario was presented. The think-aloud sessions were recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Analysis

The analysis consisted of two parts. First, we counted how often participants put each scenario in their top five, in order to determine their preferences for the scenarios. Because we did not want to demand too much time or concentration from the participants, we kept to one-hour sessions and for that reason also kept track of which scenarios had been covered during the session. Second, we wanted

to gain insight into participants' repertoire of solutions and hence calculated the average number of solutions they came up with.

3.5.2. Findings

Preference for scenarios

To determine which scenarios resonated most with the participants, we analyzed the frequency with which each scenario was chosen in the participants' selections (Table 3.4). The findings indicate that participants had different preferences for the scenarios presented. *Students' personal problems* and *Workload*, with popularities of 10.8% and 10.0% respectively, emerge as favorites among all options, with the note that although they are the most preferred choices, only approximately one in ten participants selected one of the two. These findings shed light on the diversity of interests and priorities among the participants in our study, and highlight the need for a flexible and adaptive approach when these scenarios are used to elicit manifestations of teacher agency.

Repertoire of solutions

Our second aim was to investigate if the scenarios did indeed elicit multiple solutions. To achieve this, we quantified the solutions provided by each individual for each scenario. The average solutions per scenario are shown in the last column of Table 3.4. The data show that there is not one scenario in which the solution is evident, so that all the scenarios seem suitable for eliciting teacher agency. The results indicate that when faced with scenarios, a lecturer is likely to generate an average of two or more solutions. This means a participant must make an informed choice between at least two possible solutions. Because we left the choice of scenarios to the participants in this pilot, not all scenarios could be tested equally well; nevertheless, we can say that Study 4 has shown that all scenarios proved their purpose at least once. Below, we provide a fragment of a think-aloud session to show how we measured what we understood by multiple solutions:

Table 3.4

Frequency Choices, Coverage, and Average Solutions

Scenario	Frequency chosen (%)	Frequency covered	Average solutions
1. Students' personal problems	16 (10.8)	13	3.8
2. Workload	15 (10.0)	9	2.6
3. Coherence between courses	12 (8.0)	7	2.4
4. Technical issues	12 (8.0)	6	3.7
5. Student expectations	12 (8.0)	5	4.3
6. Students differ in prior knowledge	10 (6.7)	7	3.0
7. Unprepared students in lecture	9 (6.0)	7	2.9
8. Students' views on teaching quality of colleague	9 (6.0)	5	3.2
9. Educational re-design	8 (5.3)	7	2.7
10. Implementing changes in course	8 (5.3)	4	3.0
11. Students' unexpected questions	6 (4.0)	2	4.0
12. Balancing professional responsibilities	5 (3.3)	4	3.3
13. Lecture preparation	4 (2.7)	4	3.5
14. View on teaching	4 (2.7)	4	3.5
15. Interaction in online teaching	4 (2.7)	3	3.0
16. Administrative tasks in thesis supervision	3 (2.0)	3	2.7
17. Controversial topics in course	3 (2.0)	2	4.5
18. Being overwhelmed as a new lecturer	3 (2.0)	1	2.0
19. Taking offense at joke	2 (1.3)	2	3.0
20. Unmotivated students	2 (1.3)	1	4.0
21. Change of job position	1 (0.7)	1	5.0
22. Pedagogical choices	1 (0.7)	1	4.0
23. University rules	1 (0.7)	1	3.0
Total	**150**	**99**	**3.4**

Note. Five scenarios for each of the participants (n =30); percentage is number of times chosen relative to the total of 150 choices

> Scenario: Student expectations
> As a lecturer, I notice that students increasingly expect individual feedback and guidance. Students' expectations seem to have changed since my own student days, and this has put additional pressure on me as a lecturer. I appreciate that students value feedback and guidance, I understand that this is a crucial part of their learning process, and I do my best to meet their expectations. But one day, I felt completely overwhelmed by the large number of emails I received from students who asked for feedback or a one-on-one meeting. So I knew I had to come up with a solution.

Below we show Olivia's response, with her solutions underlined to clarify how we analyzed them:

> "Yeah, so there are options out there that you can consider. You can organize feedback in different ways. You can try to [1] put less pressure on individual students for feedback and instead focus on providing collective feedback that benefits everyone. Another approach is to [2] narrow down your feedback focus. For instance, you could delve deep into specific parts of students' work and provide more general feedback for the rest. This way, you can frame your feedback more efficiently. This is a viable choice. Alternatively, you can [3] incorporate other types of feedback, such as peer feedback. This way, students can give feedback to each other, reducing the feedback burden on you. Also, you can [4] communicate with students, explaining the limitations of time you have as a teacher to fully meet all their needs. You can clarify that due to the available time, it's challenging to address every aspect perfectly. This helps them understand that you're doing your best within the given constraints. These are the options I see in front of me."

In this example, Olivia read the scenario aloud and discussed the preferred options for dealing with this problem by thinking aloud. Because there are several affordances – four in this case (see underlining) – and it is unclear which option is best, we can deduce that this scenario does elicit agentic manifestations. The participant can then determine which option is the best in the given situation.

To sum up, Study 4 allowed us to examine whether the scenarios we developed and implemented proved useful. Our analysis focused on the breadth and purpose of this method: are we able to develop scenarios that reflect educational practice and on which lecturers' decision space is tested? The review provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of these scenarios and shed light on their applicability and impact on practice. Although not all scenarios could be tested more than once, simply because of the participants' freedom of choice and the limited time during the sessions, the results of this fourth study indicate that the scenarios constructed did lead to manifestations of teacher agency. We arrived at this conclusion because every scenario that was tested elicited multiple solutions. Therefore, we can assume that the procedure for developing scenarios as described and applied here produces valuable and usable scenarios by which to measure indications of teacher agency.

3.6 Discussion and conclusions

This paper focuses on the main research question: *In what ways can representative scenarios be developed to measure teacher agency in universities?* To answer this question, we described four studies, each designed to help with an aspect of developing valid scenarios in a trustworthy way (see Figure 3.1). Our investigation was aimed at developing and evaluating scenarios designed to elicit teacher agency in the context of university teaching practice. In the course of the four studies we developed 23 scenarios, suitable for eliciting multiple affordances that seem to capture the nature of teacher agency better than other traditional measurement tools.

Reviewing prior research made it particularly clear that measurement tools mostly deliver generic statements about agency and cannot adequately incorporate context. Moreover, in questionnaire studies there is little or no room for reflection on and consideration of particular answers. For example, Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) note that it is important to consider how professional agency dimensions may vary over time and in different contexts. Our project

builds on this observation by creating context-specific and qualitative scenarios that allow a deeper exploration of these varied contexts, as suggested by Skilling and Stylianides (2020). Leijen et al. (2021) developed a robust conceptual framework for their instrument, but the generic items of their survey raise the question of whether more specific formulations would yield similar results, as responses to the items may depend on the context considered by the participant. We addressed this issue by developing our instrument for specific situations based on real-life experiences (Hughes & Huby, 2004). To better understand the context of the responses given, and so better measure the agency of teacher educators (a subset of university lecturers), Ghiasvand et al. (2023) suggest using qualitative tools such as focus group interviews and reflective journal writing. Our research incorporates this qualitative approach and provides contextual frames in the scenarios. In a vignette study by Louws et al. (2020), the authors note uncertainty about the influence of situational characteristics on school leaders' choice of leadership instruments. The scenarios we developed allow us to explore nuanced relationships between context and decision-making (cf. Skilling & Stylianides, 2020), providing a more comprehensive perspective on agency than offered in previous studies.

Considering all this, we argue that the measurement tools currently available, both qualitative and quantitative, cannot fully capture the dynamic nature of teacher agency due to the lack of real-life context dependencies. Studies on teacher agency can only provide relevant findings if the teaching-specific context is explicitly embedded in the design of the study. Only by embedding context can researchers develop a deep understanding of the reasons why teachers do or do not demonstrate agency in a meaningful situation (Engeström, 2011). The set of scenarios developed in this project could be utilized as real-life stimuli, as demonstrated in intervention studies aimed at measuring teacher agency (cf. Yang, 2021). This means that the set of 23 scenarios can indeed be used in follow-up studies. Our project contributes to the existing literature by introducing real-life teaching contexts as a metaphorical kaleidoscope for research on teacher agency in universities.

3.6.1 Reflections on the inductive and deductive research processes

It was essential to develop qualitatively strong and internally valid scenarios to be used for follow-up research (Hughes & Huby, 2004). Although developing scenarios for research is not new, it is often only the procedural and practical aspects of using scenarios that are described. However, in this way the theoretical frameworks underlying the phenomena being studied, and the research paradigm related to the content of the scenario material, are neglected (Hughes & Huby, 2004; Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Therefore, as promised in the Introduction, we will now reflect briefly on the way our four studies contributed to trustworthy scenarios that meet Guba's (1981) criteria.

During the first three studies, constituting the inductive phase, we explicitly focused on increasing credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981) of our research. *Credibility* (the degree of believability of the findings) was enhanced by employing a multimethod approach to gather data from various sources, such as interviews and expert panels. By adopting this approach, we aimed to represent lecturers' experiences and views in a trustworthy way. Study 1 stands out as particularly solid because scenarios were derived directly from real-life situations, which reinforced the authenticity of our results. Moreover, this credibility is emphasized in Study 4, demonstrating the usability of the tested scenarios. Regarding high *dependability* (the consistency and stability of the research process and findings over time), expert panels provided input on the design and methodology. In addition, regular consultation between the authors helped maintain consistency in the interpretation of data, and the application of research methods ensured a consistent and trustworthy research process. These steps led to our scenarios being designed in such a way that each respondent received similar information, which promoted consistency and stability in the presentation of situations and ensured that participants considered similar contexts when responding to the scenarios. To ensure *confirmability* (the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings), multiple researchers were involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data during the inductive phase. This collaborative approach helped minimize individual biases and promoted an objective understanding of the findings.

Finally, the pilot (Study 4) was intended to ensure increasing *transformability*

(the extent to which research findings can be applied). Ensuring this factor involved examining how broadly the research conclusions could be used in or adapted to different situations or people. Because the pilot was deductive in nature this allowed us to gain insight into the generalizability of the conclusions in order to assess usability among participants.

3.6.2 Limitations

Caution should be taken in the interpretation of our findings because of two limitations. The first is that we used a convenience sample in Study 4, which may limit the external generalizability of our findings. The sample may not adequately represent the population because it consisted of lecturers who voluntarily chose to participate and are actively involved in educational innovation and improvement. This sampling may have biased our findings, as not all university lecturers are similarly involved in teaching. For example, we used committed lecturers who are highly involved in educational innovation and, therefore, have been able to think about improving university teaching more and could come up with more solutions than less engaged lecturers. This selection may have led to an overestimation of the number of solutions.

Second, the follow-up questioning in Study 4 may have been a limitation. We used a strict think-aloud protocol, in which free association was vital to getting as accurate solutions to the scenarios as possible. At the same time, we also wanted to challenge lecturers to look beyond their initial ideas. Therefore, we asked, "Can you think of more solutions?" These types of follow-up questions may lead to more solutions but hinder free association. Therefore, the extent to which the solutions proposed are still agentic needs to be elucidated. Follow-up research should investigate whether the solutions lecturers come up with in response to a follow-up question are still relevant.

3.6.3 Implications and conclusions

We tested the scenarios and found that they did serve their purpose for research on eliciting teacher agency. Besides research purposes, the scenarios can be used for professional lecturer development programs for academic growth and in job

interviews. For example, scenarios can be used in a card-sorting game-based activity during teacher training, as an individual reflection activity, as a start for a collegial consultation round, or as a collaborative activity to develop lecturers' repertoire of solutions. Reflecting on teaching scenarios together with colleagues or potential teaching staff creates a fertile environment in which experiences are shared, underlying values and beliefs come to the surface, insights are deepened, and collective knowledge is built. Research consistently emphasizes the benefits of self-reflection on teaching behavior (Van Beveren et al., 2018). Using the diverse set of scenarios as conversation starters – rather than as a measurement tool as we intended – can serve as a way to contribute to deep introspection and promote self-awareness and growth. Conversations or reflections through scenarios can reveal relationships and structures in this way, which is important in developing agency (Priestley et al., 2015; Rushton & Bird, 2024).

Moreover, these scenarios appear to fit ideally within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) framework. SoTL refers to a systematic approach built on reflection on and publication of the educational process, in order to improve the quality of education and contribute to the knowledge base of effective teaching practices (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). Within SoTL, the scenarios can be considered not only tools for personal reflection but also valuable sources for generating knowledge about effective teaching practices (Gilpin & Liston, 2009). For example, lecturers can use the scenarios to critically analyze their teaching practices, share insights with colleagues, and jointly explore new approaches to teaching. This process contributes to lecturers' individual professional development and the broader community of educational professionals.

To conclude, in this paper we have described how teacher agency can be measured and how to make manifestations of agency visible and accessible. The scenarios listed reveal considerations regarding actions, informed decisions, and the lecturers' decision space. This contributes to faculty professionalization for the purpose of an engaged, innovative teaching staff within universities. Empowering faculty members to reflect on their actions and conduct peer reviews and supervision contributes to forming a faculty community focused on engagement, continuous development, and innovation in university teaching.

Chapter 4

Exploring Teacher Agency in Universities: Three Types of Agentic Actions

This chapter is under review in an adapted form as:
Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Rushton, E. A. C., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (under review). *Exploring teacher agency in universities: Three types of agentic actions.*

Abstract

Understanding how university lecturers exercise teacher agency (i.e., the capacity to intentionally and constructively shape their teaching practices and professional development) is crucial for improving teaching effectiveness and fostering professional growth. Agency encompasses lecturers' intentional, proactive efforts to navigate challenges, implement effective teaching strategies, and adapt to diverse institutional constraints and opportunities. This study explored how lecturers demonstrate agency through their deliberate actions, employing scenario-based interviews with 30 university lecturers to explore their strategies for addressing challenging teaching situations. Grounded in the ecological model of teacher agency, this study identified three categories of agentic actions: Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting actions. These categories represent varied approaches to decision-making and adaptation in challenging scenarios, illustrating how lecturers navigate the cultural (norms, values, and beliefs), structural (institutional roles and relationships), and material (resources and physical conditions) elements of their teaching practices. The practical-evaluative dimension of the ecological model, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between presently available resources and individual capacities, served as the analytical framework. The findings substantiated and extended the ecological model by introducing a typology of agentic actions, offering empirically grounded insights into how lecturers exercise teacher agency within university teaching practices. This typology provides a structured framework for understanding teacher agency and offers actionable strategies to enhance lecturers' deliberate decision-making. By focusing on deliberate and context-sensitive actions, this study highlights the pivotal role of lecturers as active architects of shaping university teaching practices and navigating challenging teaching situations.

4.1 Introduction

Lecturers have a central role concerning curricular and teaching innovations within universities (Guerra et al., 2024). As experts in their field, they are expected to implement research-led educational innovations to improve teaching effectiveness, while ensuring an inclusive learning environment (Van Dijk et al., 2020). However, lecturers often face systemic constraints that impede their ability to fully realize meaningful and deliberate changes in their teaching practice (Boud & Brew, 2013; Campbell & O'Meara, 2013). Although traditionally academia has a high degree of autonomy and freedom (Lynch & Ivancheva, 2016; Vähäsantanen et al., 2020), lecturers are increasingly expected to conform to curriculum guidelines, grading frameworks, and standardized teaching evaluations (Riivari et al., 2018), suggesting a decrease of freedom in university teaching. The emphasis on standardized teaching evaluations, for example, may discourage lecturers from exploring innovative teaching methods and approaches (Lakeman et al., 2022). Instead of prioritizing improved instructional practices, lecturers may concentrate on strategies that improve their evaluation scores (Simpson & Siguaw, 2000; Stroebe, 2020). Additionally, lecturers often face time constraints that limit their ability to engage in meaningful professional development and reflection on their teaching (Campbell & O'Meara, 2013; Jääskelä et al., 2017; Kusters et al., 2023). These expectations and challenges can hinder lecturers' ability to exercise *teacher agency*, which is briefly defined as the capacity to intentionally and constructively shape their teaching practice and professional development (Molla & Nolan, 2020). Teacher agency is widely understood as a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests in diverse forms across varying contexts (Toom et al., 2015). Understanding teacher agency as an inherently dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon involves recognizing it not as a fixed trait but as a capacity manifested through diverse forms of intentional and constructive actions shaped by individual, social, and contextual factors (Priestley et al., 2015). Defining agency in this way highlights that the capacity to act intentionally and constructively is not confined to a single mode of action but instead spans a broad spectrum of practices.

Building on the understanding of teacher agency and its dynamic manifestations, it becomes crucial to examine how lecturers navigate specific challenges in their teaching practices (Evans, 2020). Yet, it is still unclear what actions lecturers take to shape their teaching practice and professional development in an intentional and constructive way. In addition, understanding lecturers' agentic actions can create greater awareness that lecturers themselves are the architects of their own practice and professional development (Durrant, 2019). Empowering lecturers to implement innovative approaches fosters a culture of continuous improvement, which is beneficial for students' learning experiences (Huat & Shunmugam, 2021; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Van Vijfeijken et al., 2024). Therefore, this study explores what kind of agentic actions university lecturers demonstrate as they navigate challenging situations.

4.1.1 Defining teacher agency

Teacher agency is conditional for proactively responding to changing educational difficulties and anticipating and preparing for future challenges and opportunities (Biesta et al., 2015; Tao & Gao, 2017). Priestley et al. (2015) argue that teacher agency is demonstrated when teachers can choose from various options in a particular situation and deliberately make decisions that align with the broader goals of the school. Conversely, agency is not demonstrated if teachers have no choices or adhere to routine behavior without considering alternatives. Although the study of Priestley et al. (2015) was conducted with teachers in secondary schools, we see the relevance in the university teaching context because university lectures also encounter vibrant and complex educational environments that require adaptive responses (Van Dijk et al., 2022).

Biesta and Tedder (2007) further emphasize the importance of contextual factors in shaping teacher agency. They argue that agency is not an inherent individual trait but rather an attainable outcome that is influenced by the specific contexts in which teachers operate. Thus, teacher agency is not a fixed characteristic but rather a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by individual capacities, past experiences, future aspirations, and contextual conditions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2012).

Building on this understanding, Priestley et al. (2015) developed the ecological approach to agency, which suggests that agency is enabled or constrained as part of teachers' active involvement within their specific professional contexts. This understanding underscores teachers' capacity to bring about change within their professional settings by strategically navigating and leveraging their contextual environment through deliberate actions to achieve their objectives. In other words, teachers are often faced with situations in or outside the classroom in which they constantly consider whether or not to adapt their lessons and teaching. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) provide a framework for understanding how these considerations are achieved, later refined by Priestley et al. (2015), that includes three dimensions: *iterational*, *projective*, and *practical-evaluative*. The iterational dimension emphasizes the influence of past experiences on teachers' agency. It recognizes that teachers' actions and decisions are often shaped by their previous encounters. The projective dimension focuses on teachers' future-oriented aspirations. It highlights the importance of setting goals and envisioning desired outcomes to guide teacher agency. Lastly, the practical-evaluative dimension represents the present, emphasizing teachers' capacity to make practical and deliberate judgments among alternative possible actions and available resources. Consequently, the outcome of the dynamic interaction among these dimensions is that teachers make deliberate, context-sensitive choices. Teacher agency arises from the interplay between past experiences, future aspirations, and present evaluations, which collectively influence the actions teachers take. The ecological model provides a valuable lens to understand these outcomes, framing them as the result of complex, contextually situated interactions.

The ecological approach to teacher agency is an acknowledged and comprehensive theoretical model that has been used in both quantitative (e.g., Ghiasvand et al., 2023; Leijen et al., 2020) and qualitative (e.g., Pantić, 2015; Rushton & Bird, 2024) research to understand the formation of teacher agency shaped by the three temporal dimensions: past, present and future. However, research has not yet considered how lecturers at universities enact agentic actions using the ecological approach. Previous studies have focused primarily on teachers in secondary school and teacher education settings, leaving a gap in the literature

as to how university lecturers demonstrate agency in their teaching practice. This gap highlights the need for further exploration of how university lecturers navigate and enact teacher agency within the ecological model, offering new insights for understanding teacher agency, substantiated from a university context.

By eliciting lecturers' agentic actions, we can provide practical, empirically based insights to explore and potentially extend the applicability of Priestley and colleagues' (2015) theoretical model of teacher agency. In short, we give substance to the model from a university teaching perspective by researching lecturers' agentic actions. To measure agentic actions, it makes sense to focus on the present, i.e. the practical-evaluative dimension, since actions are always an interplay between the agent (with its histories and goals) and the present context (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

4.1.2 Agentic actions

A recent development in literature on human agency is the rising attention for teacher agency in school settings (e.g., Priestley et al., 2015; Cong-Lem, 2021). A common thread among agency theories from their inception to the present is the notion that agentic behavior involves intentional and deliberate actions taken by individuals to achieve specific outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 2001; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Engeström, 2011). To illustrate, Vygotsky (as cited in Engeström, 2011, p. 605) described these intentional actions as follows:

> *The person, using the power of things or stimuli, controls his own behavior through them, grouping them, putting them together, sorting them. In other words, the great uniqueness of the will consists of man having no power over his own behavior other than the power that things have over his behavior. But man subjects to himself the power of things over behavior, makes them serve his own purposes and controls that power as he wants. He changes the environment with the external activity and in this way affects his own behavior, subjecting it to his own authority.*

The passage lays the foundation for understanding the practical-evaluative dimension of agency. This dimension emphasizes how individuals, through their

interactions with the environment, actively shape their behavior. In the context of teacher agency in university, this involves examining how lecturers navigate and influence their teaching environment to achieve desired outcomes. The practical-evaluative dimension thus offers insights into the dynamic interaction between individuals and their contexts (Biesta et al., 2015).

Examining teacher agency through this lens of the practical-evaluative dimension reveals the complexities and nuances of how lecturers demonstrate agency. Lecturers are not passive recipients of external influences, but rather active participants who constantly evaluate and adjust their actions based on the context. This dynamic interaction involves a constant interplay between the lecturers' intentions and the constraints or opportunities provided by the environment (Cong-Lem, 2024). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define the practical-evaluative dimension as the capacity to make judgments and decisions, given three elements which describe how people act: *cultural, structural,* and *material*. The cultural element of the practical-evaluative dimension involves the symbolic patterns and discourses that guide individuals' normative commitments and understandings of their environment. The structural element pertains to the broader institutional structures that provide constraints and opportunities for action. The material element involves the tangible resources and physical conditions that impact individuals' capacities to make and execute judgments (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2015).

Furthermore, as Leijen et al. (2020) describe, it is the evaluation of a professional situation – through the lens of cultural, structural, and material elements – that results in agentic actions. In the current study, we shared short written scenarios with lecturers that addressed aspects of the practical-evaluative dimension, with each scenario highlighting how lecturers can actively and deliberately shape their responses to various situations. To understand how lecturers express agentic actions across the three elements of the practical-evaluative dimension, we will develop a typology of actions. This typology will help categorize and better understand the various ways lecturers demonstrate agency, providing a structured framework for understanding how teacher agency in universities is achieved.

In summary, this study addresses the ecological nature of agency among university lecturers by focusing on the practical-evaluative dimension in challenging teaching situations. This focus highlights how lecturers engage with their environment, actively shaping their responses to address situations requiring action. By examining lecturers' intended actions in such scenarios, the research aims to provide accurate insights into how agentic actions can be described and categorized. The guiding research question is: What agentic actions do university lecturers articulate in the context of teaching?

4.2 Method

This scenario-based research design utilizes realistic, context-specific scenarios to explore how participants respond to and engage with complex situations. Scenario-based research is particularly useful in examining dynamic processes, such as lecturers' agentic actions, because it immerses participants in vivid, authentic decision-making contexts that mirror real-life university teaching challenges (Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). The study utilizes a set of 23 scenarios previously developed and validated by Kusters et al. (2024). The 23 topics of the scenarios consisted of a short outline of a situation, between 70 and 170 words, based on real-life challenges of lecturers in their teaching practice. The topics are brief but comprehensive enough that lecturers are able to identify with them. This scenario-based approach allows for investigating how lecturers demonstrate agency by making informed and deliberate choices in response to challenging teaching situations. The lecturers' intended actions, as indicated by their responses to the scenarios, serve as a measure of their agency in navigating complex teaching situations.

4.2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 30 lecturers working in 9 different research-intensive universities across the Netherlands. The lecturers were selected based on their expertise in their respective fields and their experience in teaching

Table 4.1

Participants' Occupational Status and Affiliation

	Leiden University	Erasmus University Rotterdam	Tilburg University	Utrecht University	Radboud University Nijmegen	University of Groningen	University of Twente	Amsterdam[a]	Maastricht University	Total
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*
Position										
Assistant prof.	5	2	-	2	1	2	1	-	-	**13**
Associate prof.	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	**5**
Full prof.	1	-	3	-	1	-	1	-	-	**6**
Postdoc.	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	**3**
FMHS	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**3**
Total	**11**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**30**

Note. $N = 30$. FMHS = Faculty of Medicine and Health Science and has different designations for academic positions. [a] University of Amsterdam (UvA) and Free University Amsterdam (VU).

(> 5 years). All participants were tenured lecturers with PhD degrees, and their activities involved lecturing or teaching small group seminars to students, research, administrative responsibilities, and, for participants from the Faculty of Medicine, this also included patient care (see Table 4.1).

This study obtained ethical approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (ICLON-IREC 2021-02). All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study. The participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time until four weeks after the data collection. Any identifiable information was anonymized during the data analysis and reporting stages to protect the participants' privacy.

4.2.2 Data collection and procedure

Data collection involved conducting scenario-based interviews with the participants. The interviews were conducted individually, with 25 interviews conducted in person and the remaining 5 online at the participant's request. Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted a maximum of 60 minutes. Participants

were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written consent before the interview began.

Before the interview sessions, a set of 23 scenarios (adopted from Kusters et al., 2024) was sent to the participants, each time in random order to avoid order bias in the selection of scenarios. Participants were asked to select five scenarios they most identified with, ensuring engagement with the scenarios prior to the interview. During the interview session, participants were presented with these scenarios. Each interview, conducted by the first author, covered two to five scenarios.

During the interview, the interviewer first checked with the participants whether the five scenarios were still relevant and whether they could identify with the scenario. Second, participants read the scenario aloud. Then, participants listed all the solutions they could think of and explained why certain solutions were or were not appropriate. This step was crucial for extracting the *deliberations* that led to intended *action*. Finally, if no more solutions and considerations were mentioned, a new scenario was presented. The interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent. The audio recordings were later transcribed verbatim, capturing the participants' responses and discussions in detail.

4.2.3 Data analysis

The analyses consisted of a deductive phase to assign agentic actions to the practical-evaluative dimension, followed by an inductive phase to typify agentic actions (see Figure 4.1). The interviews were coded by the first author in consultation with the other authors. Any discrepancies were discussed with the research team until consensus was reached.

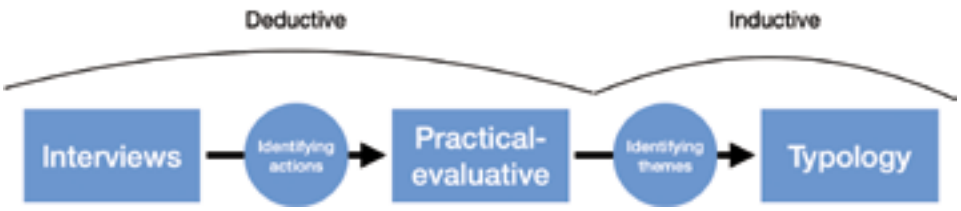

Figure 4.1

Deductive and Inductive Phases of Analyses

4.2.4 Three elements of agentic actions

In the initial phase of the analysis, the transcriptions of the interviews were thoroughly read to gain an overall understanding of the data. Subsequently, a coding scheme was developed to identify and label agentic actions in the participants' responses. The coding scheme focused on identifying actions that demonstrated agency according to the definition of Priestley et al. (2015), where individuals saw multiple options to act and could deliberately weigh which option was most appropriate given the scenario. The coding scheme categorized agentic actions into three elements that align with the practical-evaluative dimension: the cultural element consisted of actions related to the norms, values, and beliefs that guide lecturers' actions. The structural element entails actions influenced by social structures, roles, and organizational aspects. Finally, the material element consisted of actions involving the use of tangible resources or environmental factors (see Table 4.2), resulting in a list of 96 labels distributed over the three elements.

Table 4.2

Definitions of Practical-Evaluative Elements

Practical-evaluative dimension	**Initial definition** (Priestley et al., 2015)	**Example from our data**
Cultural	Ways of speaking and thinking, of ideas, values, beliefs, discourse and language, and encompass both inner and outer dialogue.	*"When a colleague depends on me, make sure the work is done in such a way that the colleague is not disturbed."*
Structural	The social structures and relationships, roles, power and trust that contribute to the achievement of agency.	*"Completing formalities takes extra time. I follow the protocol anyway because it doesn't take as much time, even if colleagues think otherwise."*
Material	The resources that promote or hinder agency and the wider physical environment in and through which agency is achieved.	*"The amount of assignments that require feedback and the amount of feedback students receive is getting out of hand and therefore I critically assess what tasks are needed."*

4.2.5 Developing a typology of agentic actions

After identifying the 96 agentic actions, the data analysis involved conducting reflexive thematic analysis to categorize these actions in order to explore overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This analysis phase involved an iterative process of reading and rereading the labels and transcripts. The authors of this paper met regularly to discuss and refine the coding scheme and to ensure consistency in the coding process. The analysis involved identifying recurring themes in the second phase that emerged from the analysis in the first phase. The thematic analysis was conducted using an inductive approach. Initially, 96 labels were identified and categorized into three elements. The identified themes resulting from the reflexive thematic analysis of the labels formed the typology of agentic actions based on the three elements.

4.3 Results

In this study, we labeled agentic actions taken by lecturers (i.e., how lecturers say they would act in a certain scenario) and categorized them into the three elements of the practical-evaluative dimension: cultural, structural, and material, based on the framework established by Priestley et al. (2015). These elements include the different actions lecturers apply to navigate between complex aspects of teaching practice. We identified three types of agentic actions: Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting. In Table 4.3, the 96 labels distributed over the three elements and categorized into three types of agentic actions are shown. In the description of the results that follow below the table, we have tried to reflect the labels (i.e., lecturers' intended actions) as much as possible to demonstrate how individual actions belong to one of the elements.

4.3.1 Leading

Actions within the Leading category are characterized by taking control, leading, or making assertive decisions. These actions often involve directing others or setting standards to achieve specific goals.

Cultural

The cultural element of Leading was demonstrated when addressing colleagues directly and setting behavioral boundaries to create clear communication and expectations. To illustrate, Lecturer 1 addressed colleagues directly, set behavioral boundaries, and shared approaches to teaching to inspire others:

> Lecturer 1: *"...present the way you teach your own course format as a model. Change so that you start convincing that if colleagues then tailor their teaching to your approach, they will also do it that way, that you will get a very good teaching program. And you can do that by sharing success experiences, just in the corridor or at lunch, and then boasting very positive student evaluations and telling them all what you're doing. So trying to inspire and enthuse colleagues to go your way."*

Thus, by openly sharing successful teaching experiences with colleagues in informal settings, lecturers can inspire others to adopt similar approaches. Other ways in which the cultural element of Leading was demonstrated were through clear communication and expectations. Lecturers encouraged transparent dialogue and created an environment where norms were clearly defined and shared. All in all, this type of actions balanced academic rigor with inclusiveness, reflected the university's values and ensured transparency, openness and shared goals within the educational environment.

Structural

The structural element of Leading was reflected in a proactive approach to initiate changes, for instance, by advocating for policy changes and initiating policy redesign. For example, Lecturer 2 advocated for policy changes by using their position within the organization to influence institutional procedures:

> Lecturer 2: *"You can use your power in the organization by, for example, putting the problem of inconsistency in the program on the agenda in the education committee to make sure that, yes, a solution must be found for this, and pointing this out in the teachers' consultation, that you feel that there are inconsistencies, that this bothers you, and that you start thinking with colleagues about what we are going to do about this."*

Table 4.3
Labels Categorized into Elements and Types of Actions

	Leading *Actions characterized by taking control, leading, or making assertive decisions, often directing others or setting standards.*	**Accommodating** *Actions involve accommodating, or prioritizing others' needs and ideas over one's own.*	**Supporting** *Actions are supportive, encouraging, or constructive, promoting a conducive and collaborative environment.*
Cultural	• Addressing the colleague directly • Setting behavioral boundaries • Balancing rigor and accessibility with students • Communicating expectations • Communicating decision-making process and involving community groups	• Accommodating the student • Acknowledging the situation • Asking clarifications from students • Listening to the student's concerns • Seeking help from experiencers • Seeking help from colleagues • Resolving arguments, reducing tension • Evaluating the situation for concerns of problems • Taking responsibility for tasks with colleagues	• Being empathetic toward students • Encouraging academic attitude • Encouraging attendance • Encouraging mutual respect • Developing personal relationships with students • Collaborating in curriculum development • Committing to personal improvement • Providing support • Supporting interaction among students • Communicating guidelines clearly • Discussing with colleagues and community groups • Engaging with colleagues and students • Using conflict situation as learning opportunity

Structural	• Advocating for policy changes • Initiating a redesign of policy • Planning strategically to comply with deadlines • Redesigning policies and procedures • Reducing bureaucracy • Negotiating working hours and conditions • Participating in decision-making • Highlighting bureaucratic processes perceived as negative • Reporting problems to authorities • Adapting teaching to own needs • Implementing structured workload management • Coordinating meetings • Attributing problems to a supervisor • Delegating to reduce work pressure	• Adjusting deadlines for students • Arranging alternative dates to accommodate student • Simplifying assessment procedures • Accepting that the job includes fewer desirable tasks • Following protocol	• Focusing on positive aspects of change • Informing authorities concerning a conflict • Approaching the exam committee for guidance

Table 4.3 (continued)

Labels Categorized into Elements and Types of Actions

Material	• Applying for grants to support enable innovation • Developing a new study program • Innovating own course • Redesigning a program • Redeveloping modules • Implementing strategies to reduce workload • Prioritizing feedback tasks • Balancing tasks to actively managing workload • Being able to say "no" • Intervening to solve conflict • Being creative with interpreting the rules • Limiting appointments • Scheduling check-ins • Scheduling feedback • Scheduling time to prepare teaching • Simplifying assessment procedures • Giving more responsibilities to students • Having backup plans to avoid failure • Implementing peer learning • Enhancing teaching through personal growth • Investing in professional development • Making own schedules • Integrating preparatory sessions • Integrating reading assignments into assessable tasks • Summarizing articles as a group activity • Taking a management course • Making changes to reduce administrative overload	• Adapting teaching methods so that lecture can continue • Adjusting the teaching method based on preparation • Adjusting the lecture • Being flexible in addressing students' questions • Coordinating with different groups • Discussion to resolve conflict between groups • Adjusting time investment • Arrive early to be prepared for unexpected problems • Deviating from the rules to accommodate student • Implementing various teaching methods • Using appropriate methods • Using alternative resources • Using digital tools • Using online platforms • Using reminders via learning platforms • Utilizing existing materials • Utilizing technology	• Asking students for help • Engaging students with teaching methods • Improvising so that lecture can continue

This proactive approach to leadership may also involve actions such as initiating policy redesigns, reducing bureaucracy, and strategically planning to meet deadlines. Reporting issues and participating in decision-making processes are key elements in leading structural change, ensuring institutional efficiency and better working conditions.

Material

The material element of Leading was demonstrated by optimizing teaching practices through innovation, workload management, personal and professional development, and strategic adjustments to reduce administrative burdens. Leading through the material element was illustrative by a quote from Lecturer 3 when they applied for grants to secure resources, thereby reducing workload and supporting innovation:

> Lecturer 3: *"The resources you [as a lecturer] have are not that great, but you can, for example, try to get more money by writing grant applications yourself so you can hire student assistants from that to reduce the workload."*

This material element was also shown when Lecturers took initiative by redesigning study programs, enhancing educational materials, and implementing effective workload management. This proactive leadership on the material aspect may thus function as an important driver for resource management and ensures continuous improvement in the learning environment.

4.3.2 Accommodating

Accommodating actions involve prioritizing others' needs and ideas, often over one's own. These actions are geared toward creating a supportive and inclusive environment for students and colleagues.

Cultural

The cultural element of Accommodating was demonstrated when the lecturer acknowledged the student's situation and showed sensitivity to the students' cultural and personal backgrounds. Cultural accommodating was demonstrated

when Lecturer 4 showed sensitivity to the needs of colleagues, providing feedback in a timely manner to support their progress:

> Lecturer 4: *"If I saw [feedback] as an administrative task, a kind of bureaucratic obligation, I would be more likely to put it off or not do it at all... However, if a colleague really needs the feedback to move on, I would feel guilty for holding up that colleague."*

These culturally Accommodating actions reflect a commitment to empathy and support in the workplace, creating an environment where colleagues' needs are prioritized over personal convenience, thereby fostering collaboration and shared responsibility.

Structural

The structural element of Accommodating was concerned with adapting institutional structures by accommodating individual needs through flexible deadlines, alternative arrangements, and adjustments to ensure inclusivity and support for colleagues and students. Structural accommodation was demonstrated by Lecturer 5 when they adjusted deadlines for students with legitimate reasons, even when institutional rules suggested otherwise:

> Lecturer 5: *"If you notice that there is something wrong with that student and he has not shown up twice... then according to the rules, you should not give him a grade. But if there really is something, I think you just shift the deadline for that student."*

This flexibility in adjusting structural policies showcases a leadership approach that prioritizes student well-being and fairness while navigating institutional constraints. All in all, structural accommodating actions by lecturers involve making intentional adjustments to institutional structures and practices to meet the diverse needs of students. These actions aim to balance institutional expectations with individual circumstances, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity while maintaining educational standards, even if it requires thoughtful deviation from institutional guidelines.

Material

The material element of Accommodating, includes being flexible in addressing students' questions, using appropriate methods, and adapting material resources to better suit the needs of the classroom. Lecturer 6 formulated this as follows:

> Lecturer 6: *"Sometimes that leads to me giving up my own research time to be there for that student, because after all, education takes priority."*

This type of action was illustrative of lecturers prioritizing education by adjusting their own research time to be available for students. By adapting resources, seeking help to share responsibilities, and using digital tools, lecturers ensure that material and time constraints are managed to benefit the students, showcasing a flexible and supportive teaching environment.

4.3.3 Supporting

Supporting actions are those that encourage, construct, and promote a healthy and collaborative environment. These actions are aimed at fostering a supportive culture among students and colleagues.

Cultural

The cultural element of Supporting includes being empathetic to students and encouraging an academic attitude, which contributes to a supportive environment. Supporting culturally was illustrated by Lecturer 7, who emphasized empathy and a commitment to creating a positive learning environment for students, even within personal and academic boundaries:

> Lecturer 7: *"If it's an academically motivated problem, it's much easier for us to intervene to help students... We can give advice and offer empathy, but yes, I think there are limits to how much you can do, but you do what you can to create a fine learning environment for students."*

This demonstrates a leadership approach that fosters mutual respect, personal relationships, and academic encouragement, creating a collaborative and empathetic educational environment. Ultimately, the cultural element of

supporting students through empathy and academic encouragement fosters a collaborative learning environment where lecturers value personal relationships.

Structural

The structural element of Supporting focus on fostering a positive and efficient organizational environment. Structural support was demonstrated by Lecturer 8, who advocated for students by arranging additional exam opportunities when necessary, showing flexibility in navigating institutional policies:

> Lecturer 8: *"If I were responsible for that exam, yes, I would arrange a student's third attempt. Officially, I believe that has to go through the exam committee, but I would have no problem arranging that on my own."*

This action illustrates a commitment to supporting students by ensuring fair access to assessments and resolving institutional challenges for student success. In summary, the structural element of supporting students emphasizes creating a flexible environment where lecturers actively navigate institutional policies to pursue a supportive learning environment.

Material

The material element of Supporting refers to collaboration and adaptability to enhance the educational process. Material support was demonstrated by Lecturer 9, who adapted their teaching methods to ensure effective learning continued despite time constraints:

> Lecturer 9: *"So I see myself then just shifting didactics to make that impact on those students optimal."*

By improvising and adapting instructional methods, lecturers create a dynamic and responsive learning environment, ensuring that material resources and time are utilized effectively to support students' learning experiences. Ultimately, materially supporting students involves collaboration and adaptability, where lecturers adjust teaching methods and optimize resources to create an effective learning environment.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Typology of agentic actions

With this study, we aimed to empirically investigate how agentic actions are demonstrated in university teaching practice, drawing on Priestley and colleagues' (2015) theoretical ecological model. The findings of this study help clarify the complexities of teacher agency within the university context, reinforcing and extending the theoretical perspectives presented by Priestley et al. (2015) and Biesta and Tedder (2007). The guiding research question was: What agentic actions do university lecturers articulate in the context of teaching? This resulted in a typology of agentic actions into Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting across the cultural, structural, and material elements of the practical-evaluative dimension, providing a nuanced understanding of how lecturers navigate and shape their teaching environments.

The complexity of understanding and investigating teacher agency arises from the various dimensions that influence how lecturers exercise their agency (Toom et al., 2015). Teacher agency is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather involves a dynamic interplay of cultural, structural, and material factors, which are informed by the past experiences and aspirations of individuals. This complexity is reflected in the diverse ways lecturers navigate their roles and responsibilities. For instance, a lecturer might take a leading role in one context to set an example for students, while in another context, the same lecturer might choose to support or accommodate students instead. Various factors, including the specific needs of the student group, the educational setting, and the broader institutional environment influence the decision to lead, accommodate, or support. Therefore, we stress that the typology presented in this study—Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting—should be understood as non-hierarchical and non-normative. This means that these categories are not ranked or evaluated in terms of their effectiveness or desirability. Instead, they represent different modes of agentic action that lecturers might employ based on the context.

4.4.2 Leading actions

The Leading actions observed in this study align with the idea that proactive and assertive actions are important for increasing a culture in which the participation of lecturers in decision-making and taking responsibility for enhancing teaching practice is supported. These findings align closely with the emphasis on transformational and empowering leadership styles (Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2020). Proactive and assertive actions are essential components of transformational leadership, which Koeslag-Kreunen and colleagues (2020) identify as particularly effective in supporting team learning behaviors. Transformational leadership, characterized by challenging the status quo and stimulating intellectual engagement, encourages lecturers to actively participate in decision-making and take responsibility for enhancing teaching practices (Ghamrawi et al., 2024). These actions, particularly within the cultural element, highlight the importance of clear communication and inclusive decision-making processes. This supports the notion that lecturers who engage in assertive leadership can foster an environment of openness and transparency, ultimately contributing to a respectful and structured teaching atmosphere (Priestley et al., 2015). Furthermore, the structural and material elements of Leading actions demonstrate lecturers' capacity to influence and improve institutional policies and resource management. This proactive approach emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and resource allocation in facilitating innovative teaching practices (Ghiasvand et al., 2023).

4.4.3 Accommodating actions

Accommodating actions which prioritize the needs of others aligns with the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher agency. This approach involves adapting to the ever-changing classroom environment and student needs, as described by Biesta and Tedder (2007). These accommodating actions underscore the importance of empathy, flexibility, and adaptability in addressing students' diverse needs and fostering an inclusive educational environment (Green et al., 2020). By adjusting deadlines, simplifying assessments, and integrating flexible teaching methods, lecturers demonstrate a commitment to creating an inclusive and responsive learning experience (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011).

This finding is interesting because accommodating actions may promote inclusive education. The review study by Miller et al. (2020) found that teachers employed various instructional strategies and differentiation techniques to support inclusive education. These strategies included flexible grouping, peer mentoring, and tailored curricular assistance, which are similar to the accommodating actions of adjusting deadlines and simplifying assessments. By implementing these approaches, educators can ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, can access and engage meaningfully with the curriculum (Miller et al., 2020).

Moreover, accommodating actions can have a profound impact on student engagement and motivation (Martin & Dowson, 2009). When students perceive that their individual needs are acknowledged and addressed, they are more likely to feel valued within the educational setting. This can lead to increased participation and engagement in their learning, contributing to a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment. The study by Martin and Dowson (2009) supports this by emphasizing that relationships and care provided by teachers, are central to student motivation and engagement. In particular, students' sense of being respected and valued by teachers is consistently linked to higher motivation and achievement.

4.4.4 Supporting actions

Supporting actions aimed at fostering a collaborative and conducive environment highlight the critical role of beliefs in teaching and learning practices (Biesta et al., 2015). Namely, cultivating such an environment involves encouraging reflective practice among lecturers, which helps them align their teaching methods with their beliefs and effectively support student learning. By investing in professional development and encouraging active participation, lecturers create an environment conducive to continuous improvement and innovation (Gokpinar-Shelton, & Pike, 2021). In addition, Martin and Dowson (2009) noted that teacher support, particularly in supporting student autonomy, enhances curiosity, and a desire for challenge.

The relevance of this finding can be found in (derivatives of) Problem-Based Learning (PBL) education, where lecturers' supportive actions are an important

feature, as lecturers function as facilitators of learning more than dispensing knowledge (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). PBL is a student-centered teaching approach that emphasizes real-world problem-solving, self-regulation, and teamwork. At some Dutch universities, PBL is used as a comprehensive teaching method, while at all universities, PBL is incorporated into smaller teaching activities, such as seminars, in addition to large-scale lectures. PBL requires students to engage deeply with the material, collaborate with peers, and actively participate in their learning process. Consequently, lecturers should use their agency to take on their supportive role because without adequate support from lecturers, students might struggle with the self-directed nature of PBL. To illustrate, Amerstorfer and Von Münster-Kistner (2021) found that positive student-teacher relationships in PBL foster a relaxed learning environment where students feel respected and valued. The findings from our study, therefore, align with and extend existing literature, reinforcing the importance of supporting actions in fostering a collaborative and healthy educational environment.

4.4.5 Implications for theory and practice

The findings of this study empirically substantiate the ecological model of teacher agency by demonstrating how lecturers' actions are shaped by and, in turn, shape their professional contexts. This study underscores the ecological model's utility as an analytical framework for examining teacher agency within university settings. Our results elucidate the constitution of teacher agency through the elements of the practical-evaluative dimension, revealing how these elements are manifested in actual actions. Thus, in addition to understanding *what constitutes* teacher agency, it is now also evident *how* actions are manifested in scenarios that call for agency.

Furthermore, the typology of agentic actions offers insights into how lecturers navigate and shape their teaching environments. This typology can assist universities tailor their support systems and professional development programs more effectively, by either strengthening agentic actions that are already present or improving agentic actions that should be developed, both aimed at enhancing the overall educational experience. Namely, agentic lecturers

are able to set an example or norm (Leading), put aside their self-interest for a wider purpose (Accommodating), or provide others with an enjoyable learning experience (Supporting). We describe below implications for policymakers, peers, and individual lecturers.

For policymakers, insights from this typology can help implement mentoring programs where experienced lecturers guide newer faculty members in developing their teaching strategies. Such mentorship initiatives can foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation, ensuring that lecturers are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. Moreover, professional conversations within universities should be more about *how* and *why* lecturers participate in practices, rather than *what* they do. *What* reduces efforts to quantitative statistics, while *how* and *why* invite reflection and development. For peers, understanding agentic actions can promote a collaborative culture where different teaching strategies are shared and supported. Departments could, for example, establish regular peer-led workshops where lecturers demonstrate and discuss their leading, accommodating, or supporting strategies. These workshops can serve as platforms for sharing best practices, fostering innovation, and building a community of practice among educators. Finally, individual lecturers benefit significantly by reflecting on their own practices and seeking targeted professional development opportunities. By understanding their typology of agentic actions, lecturers can adapt their methods to be more effective in diverse situations. For example, a lecturer might attend a seminar on accommodating diverse student needs and then apply these strategies to better support students with varying learning styles. As Rushton & Bird (2024) demonstrated in the context of secondary education, teacher agency can be cultivated when teachers recognize and experience spaces for professional learning and development. Therefore, our typology, which categorizes three different types of actions, helps illustrate how actions can be expressed and developed. Overall, applying the typology of agentic actions could provide insights which support the creation of more adaptive, supportive, and effective teaching environments in universities.

4.4.6 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, we concentrated particularly on the practical-evaluative dimension because our aim was to characterize agentic actions. The focus on lecturers' actions in the present limits the results in information about the iterational and projective dimensions. Our focus on actions in the present provides a nuanced understanding of how lecturers navigate their teaching environments, demonstrating that agentic actions are context-dependent and reflective of the complexities inherent in teaching. However, given the three dimensions of the ecological model of teacher agency, actions are a result of past experiences and future aspirations of individuals. These dimensions (i.e., the iterational and the projective) are implicitly reflected in the participants' responses but not explicitly inquired in our study. Therefore, now that we have established a typology of actions, we recommend that future research incorporate a broader approach that collects data on the iterational and projective dimensions, examining how different professional backgrounds and aspirations influence lecturer practices. Exploring how past experiences and future goals impact lecturers' actions will further enhance our understanding of the complexities involved in teacher agency.

Second, our study measured *intended* actions based on predetermined scenarios rather than *observing* real-life actions. Although this approach effectively exposed lecturers to challenging situations and allowed us to investigate lecturers' responses, it is important to recognize that intended actions may differ from actual practices. We therefore suggest that future research should consider using this typology of intended actions in observing real-life agentic actions to validate the typology in the teaching practice.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides an understanding of the agentic actions lecturers demonstrate to navigate challenging teaching situations. We developed a typology of agentic actions in university teaching by categorizing lecturers' actions

following the practical-evaluative dimension of the ecological model (Priestley et al., 2015). This typology comprises Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting actions. The findings highlight how lecturers actively foster a supportive culture, promote collaboration, innovate courses, and address systemic constraints. The participants in our study demonstrated their agency in different ways to cope with challenging situations, with the aim of improving their teaching practice. This proactive stance enables them to create a more engaging and effective learning environment despite systemic pressures. Therefore, we argue that lecturers should be assessed, valued, and rewarded based on their teacher agency rather than on standardized student evaluations, which, as Stroebe (2020) argues, "encourage poor teaching." Furthermore, by incorporating our typology into the ecological model, we provide a clearer framework to identify and understand the various ways lecturers exercise their teacher agency. This, in turn, can guide universities in recognizing and fostering the true impact of lecturers' efforts on student learning and development.

Chapter 5

Teacher Agency in Universities: Exploring Underlying Beliefs and Agentic Orientations When Navigating University Teaching Practices

This chapter is under review in an adapted form as:
Kusters, M., Rushton, E. A. C., De Vetten, A., Admiraal, W., & Van der Rijst, R. (under review). *Teacher agency in universities: Exploring underlying beliefs and agentic orientations when navigating university teaching practices.*

Abstract

In times when universities are being redefined by rapidly changing technological, global, and cultural shifts, lecturers experience challenges aligning their pedagogical beliefs with shifting institutional and societal expectations. This alignment could be achieved by fostering teacher agency, which is briefly understood as the capacity of lecturers to act purposefully to influence their professional spaces and impact student learning. Through semi-structured and scenario-based interviews with 12 participants from a Scottish university, this study investigated how lecturers' beliefs and intentions about teaching and learning reflect their agentic actions in various teaching scenarios. Initially, the study identified three groups of shared agentic orientations: 1. *Accommodating & Supporting*, 2. *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting*, and 3. *Leading*, showing how they respond to challenges in distinct ways. Reflexive Thematic Analysis further revealed that each group embodied shared beliefs about teaching and learning, specifically: *Inclusivity* and *Equity* for the first group, *Responsibility* and *Collaboration* for the second group, and *Change* and *Innovation* for the third group. This study highlights the complex interplay between university lecturers' beliefs and agentic orientations in navigating challenging teaching situations. Additionally, the findings contribute to the ecological model of teacher agency by offering new insights into how lecturers' beliefs inform their actions in university teaching.

5.1 Introduction

In the rapidly evolving university landscape, where artificial intelligence, global competition, and internationalization are reshaping institutions, lecturers encounter complex challenges in their roles. Balancing effective pedagogy with personal values and shifting societal expectations has become increasingly demanding (Eggins et al., 2021). In this dynamic context, teaching approaches equip lecturers to address the varied needs of their students while navigating these broader institutional demands (Minett-Smith & Davis, 2019). To effectively meet these challenges, lecturers require not only disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical skills but also the opportunity to exercise teacher agency. This empowers lecturers to align teaching with their pedagogical goals, personal values, and broader institutional objectives, creating coherent and purpose-driven educational spaces. Lecturers' ability to achieve agency, i.e., purposefully and deliberately navigating challenging teaching practices, is interrelated with their professional beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching and learning (Biesta et al., 2015). These beliefs are rooted in lecturers' professional experiences, backgrounds, and disciplinary perspectives.

Lecturers' beliefs about teaching and learning at universities are pivotal in deliberately shaping their practices (Norton et al., 2005; Pantić, 2015; Yang & Clarke, 2018). These beliefs influence not only how lecturers perceive their roles but also the ways they navigate and contribute to the teaching and learning process (Nguyen, 2020; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). By reflecting on their beliefs and engaging in collaborative practices, lecturers can create spaces of agency that empower them to critically adjust their practices. In the secondary school context, Rushton & Bird (2024) have previously argued that creating and navigating spaces of agency allows teachers to critically examine their beliefs and address the complexities of their practices. Spaces of agency are therefore created through opportunities for reflection and dialogic interaction, where teachers and lecturers critically examine their beliefs and adjust their practices to foster, for example, student-centered learning spaces (Yang & Clarke, 2018; Nguyen, 2020). It is within these spaces of agency that lecturers

reconcile external constraints with internal beliefs, positioning themselves as active agents of pedagogical transformation (Yang & Clarke, 2018). Moreover, lecturers' beliefs and their ability to exercise teacher agency are pivotal in bridging the gap between educational policies and the lived realities of teaching practices. Research highlights the need for lecturers to engage with reform initiatives critically, using their agency to reinterpret and implement policies in ways that align with their beliefs and students' needs (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017).

The interrelated nature of teacher agency and professional beliefs profoundly impacts teaching practices, particularly in institutions with diverse student populations and lecturers who bring in varied academic backgrounds, cultural perspectives, and levels of professional experience. As Oleson and Hora (2014) argue, teaching practices are shaped by a wide range of experiences, including lecturers' own time as students and academics. Compared to primary and secondary school teachers, for example, university lecturers frequently receive limited formal training in teaching methodologies and pedagogies prior to taking up their role (Oleson & Hora, 2014; Vreekamp et al., 2023). Thus, although university lecturers often bring valuable knowledge and skills from their experiences to their work practices, lecturers' knowledge and skills are not always informed by professional learning programs with a focus on teaching practices. To better understand the educational principles guiding their practices, it is necessary to examine the rationale behind lecturers' decision-making processes. In particular, understanding how lecturers' agentic actions, i.e., deliberate and purposeful actions, are influenced by their underlying beliefs.

In summary, investigating the relationship between lecturers' agentic actions and professional beliefs is necessary for understanding *how* and *why* university lecturers shape their teaching practices in a certain way (cf. Biesta et al., 2018; Norton et al., 2005). Therefore, to understand how lecturers respond to challenging situations, we examine in this study what beliefs (the *why*) underlie agentic actions (the *how*).

5.1.1 The ecological model of teacher agency

Teacher agency refers to teachers actively shaping their teaching spaces, making informed decisions, and taking purposeful action in response to the complex demands of teaching. It emphasizes teachers as active agents who can influence their work conditions, teaching practices, and ultimately, the learning experiences of their students, rather than being passive implementers of external policies or curricula (Vähäsantanen et al., 2009; Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). The ecological approach to teacher agency, as developed and refined through research on how teachers engaged with curriculum reform in primary and secondary education in Scotland, conceptualizes agency not as a fixed trait or an isolated quality. Instead, teacher agency is understood as emerging from the dynamic interaction between teachers and their professional space (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). It is dynamic and relational, shaped by the surrounding context, such as policies, school culture, and student needs, as well as the teacher's personal experiences, beliefs, and aspirations (Biesta et al., 2015). This approach emphasizes that teacher agency develops over time and across different contexts, considering three dimensions: the iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015). These three dimensions conceptualize teacher agency as an interplay of past experiences (iterational), future aspirations (projective), and present adaptability (practical-evaluative), enabling teachers to navigate and shape their professional contexts effectively. The iterational dimension reflects how teachers' past experiences shape their current practices, using routines and past strategies as resources for present decisions. The projective dimension highlights teachers' ability to set future goals, envision desired outcomes, and plan changes in their teaching methods or classroom culture. The practical-evaluative dimension focuses on teachers' real-time decision-making, where they navigate immediate challenges, balance resources, and adapt to their context, integrating past insights and future aspirations to address present needs. The dimensions are interconnected and should be understood as a "chordal triad" that together constitute teacher agency. This triadic relationship forms a dynamic and responsive approach to teaching (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2015).

Agentic actions

The role of agentic actions in teaching stresses the strategic and adaptive nature of lecturers' responses to challenging teaching situations. Agentic actions illustrate the responsive nature of teaching, where lecturers draw on personal narratives and professional experiences to align their actions with specific educational outcomes. Kusters et al. (under review) described a typology of intended agentic actions lecturers demonstrate when navigating challenging teaching situations, i.e., *Leading* (setting the norm), *Accommodating* (placing others' needs above their own), and *Supporting* (creating a conducive learning space). *Leading* actions are characterized by taking control and making assertive decisions, often directing others or setting standards. *Accommodating* actions involve prioritizing others' needs and ideas over one's own. *Supporting* actions are encouraging and constructive, promoting a conducive and collaborative learning space. While this typology of agentic actions offers insights into lecturers' responses to challenging teaching situations, it does not explain how lecturers apply these actions across different contexts and over time. Additionally, although the typology sheds light on present actions (the practical-evaluative), it does not illustrate how these actions are shaped by past professional experiences (the iterational) or future-oriented goals (the projective). This current study provides a deeper exploration of the underlying beliefs and purposes that drive lecturers' agentic actions, as these foundational elements shape not only how actions manifest in the present but also how they evolve across contexts and time.

5.1.2 Underlying beliefs of agentic actions

The underlying beliefs and purposes that shape lecturers' actions are central to understanding their agentic actions in teaching. These beliefs are not incidental but are integral to the practices, choices, and motivations that lecturers bring into their work. Drawing on the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), lecturers' actions in the present (practical-evaluative) are interrelated with their habits (iterational) and aspirations (projective) within the institutional framework (Biesta et al., 2018). The ecological model illustrates that lecturers'

practices are shaped by both their experiences and the goals they set within the constraints and affordances of their teaching spaces.

The concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) further stresses how lecturers' beliefs and actions are deeply embedded within the structures of their institutions. *Habitus*, as a system of ingrained dispositions, is shaped by factors such as socio-cultural background, educational experiences, and professional space (Lefstein et al., 2020). Although *habitus* can be adapted to new settings, it often reinforces existing norms unconsciously, perpetuating certain educational practices without deliberate intent. In this way, lecturers' choices and strategies are deeply embedded in the institutional contexts, which include policies, structural supports, and professional relationships that shape agency and decision-making processes (Biesta, 2022; Gonzales, 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2014). According to Leijen et al. (2020), reflective practices allow lecturers to connect their experiences and habits to institutional contexts, fostering a deeper understanding of their teaching philosophies and actions. Consequently, beliefs serve as the foundation for agentic actions, guiding lecturers in their decision-making and allowing them to navigate the complex demands of university teaching. Therefore, teacher agency plays a pivotal role in this process, as it enables lecturers to navigate institutional demands while shaping and reshaping their professional identities (Li & Ruppar, 2021). By doing so, they align their practices with evolving educational expectations and foster meaningful change.

Furthermore, Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) investigated lecturers' orientations to teaching, finding that their practices are guided by deliberate orientations rooted in educational beliefs and goals, rather than mere reactions to situations. In exploring agentic actions in challenging teaching situations, the connection between personal beliefs, contextual challenges, and adaptive strategies becomes evident (Biesta et al., 2015; Li & Ruppar, 2021). Eliciting agentic responses provide a means to understand how lecturers interpret their roles, adjust to evolving expectations, and pursue objectives that align with their vision of education. The inquiry into lecturers' agentic responses is vital for comprehensively understanding teacher agency, as it interweaves experience,

orientation, and aspiration into a cohesive framework that explains how lecturers navigate their professional landscapes.

In conclusion, understanding teacher agency among university lecturers requires examining their responses to challenging teaching situations, which offers contextualized insights into their backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations. These agentic responses reveal the beliefs, motivations, and intentions guiding their actions and show how they make sense of their roles, adapt to changes, and align actions with specific goals. Investigating responses highlights the ways lecturers navigate challenges, employ strategies, and pursue aspirations, providing a comprehensive view of their professional practices and teacher agency. This study is centered on the research question: *What shared beliefs about teaching do university lecturers express, and how are these reflected in their agentic orientations?*

5.2 Method

A scenario-based approach to interviews was used to gather responses from lecturers regarding real-life challenging teaching scenarios, adopted from Kusters et al. (2024). These 23 scenarios were developed and validated through a multi-method study to ensure they accurately represent university teaching practices. The scenarios were validated to effectively elicit teacher agency, and designed to be relatable to lecturers, allowing lecturers to identify with multiple scenarios (Kusters et al., 2024). The scenario-based method allows participants to engage with hypothetical but realistic scenarios, providing insights into their perceptions, decision-making processes, and behavioral responses in a controlled manner. By using these scenarios, the study aimed to elicit authentic and contextually relevant responses, ensuring the validity and applicability of the findings to real-world teaching practices. This method is particularly effective in capturing complex dynamics and nuanced reactions, making it suitable for examining lecturers' experiences and strategies in navigating teaching challenges. In addition, a semi-structured interview approach was used to investigate lecturers' reasonings for

starting or sustaining a career in academia and what motivates and moves them to be engaged in teaching.

5.2.1 Data collection

Data collection involved conducting interview sessions with 12 participants (Table 5.1), all from the Education Division of a Scottish university. Each session was structured into two distinct parts: an in-depth semi-structured interview and a scenario-based interview, with each lecturer presented with three scenarios of participants' choice. Overall, each interview session lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. The semi-structured interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and was guided by a framework focused on participants' professional backgrounds and motivations for pursuing or continuing a career in academia. The interviews started with questions about participants' life and professional histories, including their previous (teaching) experiences, current roles, and key career milestones. Open-ended questions encouraged reflections on memorable teaching moments, challenges, and pivotal events shaping their careers, aiming to uncover the deeper motivations and values underlying their commitment to academia. In addition, future-focused questions were asked about aspirations, planned changes in their academic roles, and long-term career plans so that both past experiences and future goals were examined holistically. Then, the scenario-based interview, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, explored the participants' responses to various university teaching situations. The interviews were transcribed verbatim upon completion for further analyses. The transcripts were shared with the participants, and they were invited to provide any revisions or additions. Two participants indicated that they wanted to provide additional comments by email. These comments were added to the transcript.

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (ICLON-IREC 2021-02). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and precautions were taken to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study up until four weeks after data collection.

Table 5.1

Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Position	Years of university teaching experience	Classification
Amelia	Program Director and Lecturer	11	Mid-Career Academic
Ava	Senior Lecturer	2	Early Career Academic
Emma	Lecturer	5	Early Career Academic
Isabella	Program Director and Lecturer	3	Early Career Academic
James	Lecturer	2	Mid-Career Academic
John	Program Director, PhD Student, and Lecturer	2	Transitional Academic
Mary	Lecturer	4	Early Career Academic
Mia	Senior Lecturer	9	Mid-Career Academic
Michael	PhD Student and Lecturer	1	Transitional Academic
Olivia	Lecturer	2	Early Career Academic
Sophia	Lecturer	7	Mid-Career Academic
William	Professor	25	Experienced Academic

Identifiable information was anonymized during data analysis and reporting to safeguard participants' privacy. However, participants were informed of the possibility of recognition, particularly within the institution, despite efforts to ensure anonymity.

5.2.2 Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti, where transcripts of the collected data were uploaded to organize and categorize the information systematically. We coded the responses to the scenarios using the typology of agentic actions consisting of *Leading*, *Accommodating*, and *Supporting* actions (Kusters et al., under review). This analysis showed that lecturers tended to deploy a similar combination of agentic actions in varying situations, which we have identified as *agentic orientation*. In this way, we distinguished three groups of lecturers with similar approaches when navigating challenging teaching practices (see Table 5.2). These three groups are lecturers with a 1) *Accommodating &*

Table 5.2

Agentic Orientations Classified by Majority Agentic Actions

Pseudonym	Leading actions	Accommodating actions	Supporting actions	Agentic orientation
Amelia	9	2	-	Leading
Ava	-	4	4	Accommodating & Supporting
Emma	8	-	2	Leading
Isabella	-	5	8	Accommodating & Supporting
James	3	3	5	Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting
John	5	4	4	Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting
Mary	-	3	6	Accommodating & Supporting
Mia	-	6	7	Accommodating & Supporting
Michael	1	4	4	Accommodating & Supporting
Olivia	5	1	-	Leading
Sophia	4	3	3	Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting
William	6	3	3	Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting

Supporting orientation, 2) *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation, or 3) *Leading* orientation. Then, from the transcripts, we created narrative profiles of around 500 words per participant, providing an overview of their career paths and motivations, and teaching beliefs and aspirations. Finally, we conducted a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2021) of each group of lecturers with similar agentic orientations (i.e., the three groups described above). By conducting RTA, we examined the narratives to code the beliefs of each individual in each group. In this way, we described underlying beliefs and linked these to their agentic orientations.

5.3 Findings

In this section, we present the findings that led to the formation of three groups, each characterized by a distinct agentic orientation and shared underlying beliefs. Once the lecturers were categorized based on their agentic orientations, a process

of RTA identified shared beliefs within each of the previously established groups. Three groups of lecturers with distinct orientations were identified. Within the three distinct groups of lecturers, shared beliefs were identified that align with and further define their orientations. These are as follows:

- The *Accommodating & Supporting* oriented lecturers shared beliefs about *Inclusivity* and *Equity*;
- The *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* oriented lecturers shared beliefs about *Responsibility* and *Collaboration*;
- The *Leading* oriented lecturers shared beliefs about *Change* and *Innovation*.

To illustrate orientations, we share quotations which highlight specific agentic actions taken by lecturers. Following this, we demonstrate how the narratives of each group with a particular orientation reveal common beliefs that further define and unify their orientation. For instance, within the group of lecturers who had an *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation, lecturers often used equivalents of words such as "inclusion" and "inclusivity." Whereas lecturers who had a *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* used equivalent words such as "together" and "collaborating" and Leading orientation used words such as "improving" and "innovating."

Identifying similar agentic orientations

Our analysis revealed further nuances and understandings within the typology of agentic actions in response to challenging teaching situations. While a broad framework for agentic actions exists, the manifestation of these actions varied among *individual* lecturers, depending on the specific context and challenges they encountered. Rather than a single, uniform type of agentic action, we found a multifaceted interplay where lecturers employed a combination of agentic actions when facing multiple scenarios.

From the data, we identified three distinct categories of agentic action, which we labeled "agentic orientations." First, the *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation was identified in the narratives of Ava, Isabella, Mary, Mia, and Michael. An *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation is characterized by prioritizing the

needs and preferences of colleagues and students over personal or professional needs in every scenario. It involves showing flexibility, adapting to institutional requirements, and collaborating effectively to maintain a cooperative workspace. The accommodating aspect demonstrates a willingness to adjust one's practices or preferences for the greater good, while the supporting aspect emphasizes fostering positive and conducive learning spaces that aim for a harmonious and productive educational or professional setting where all community members feel valued and supported.

Second, the *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation was identified in the responses of James, John, Sophia, and William. This orientation is similar to the above, but lecturers with this orientation also explicitly stated "setting the norms" in situations. This orientation integrates assertive leadership with flexibility and compassion across various scenarios. It involves taking proactive and decisive actions to advocate for others, especially when institutional policies or rigid frameworks may not align with their specific needs.

Third, the *Leading* orientation was identified in the narratives of Amelia, Emma, and Olivia. These lecturers emphasize being progressive and mention that they strive to raise the standard. Lecturers who have a *Leading* orientation are assertive and proactive in almost all scenarios and stress the importance of balancing institutional demands with a strong commitment to providing good education.

Accommodating & Supporting orientation

Lecturers with an *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation (i.e., Ava, Isabella, Mary, Mia, and Michael) strive for conducive learning spaces in which sometimes the needs of others take priority over one's own when navigating challenging teaching practices. We show here how *agentic actions* are deployed with an *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation in navigating teaching scenarios. An example illustrates how Michael balances the university's regulations with his personal educational values to support students in achieving their goals. It shows how he navigates between institutional guidelines and his belief in providing the best possible assistance to help students succeed:

> *There's no one set answer, of course [on how to help students] but I would always first and foremost give the student the opportunities to say what's going on, what he or she wants to say, and help the student finish the course. So even if that means extending deadlines, offering a second or third retake for a paper or whatever. There are some university rules that I do avoid to help students.*

Michael demonstrates accommodating behavior by recognizing that the conventional approach (adhering strictly to university guidelines) is not suitable for this particular situation. As a result, Michael supports the student by offering an additional retake, thereby showing flexibility and a willingness to adapt to the student's needs.

Beliefs about Inclusivity and Equity

The lecturers with an *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation (i.e., Ava, Isabella, Mary, Mia, and Michael) shared beliefs rooted in a commitment to inclusivity and equity. Their language frequently revolved around terms like "inclusive," "social justice," "equity," "critical pedagogy," "students' needs," "responsiveness," and "decolonizing," reflecting a shared focus on promoting diverse and inclusive educational spaces. These kinds of words were manifested in how these lecturers describe their teaching, interact with students, and collaborate with colleagues, demonstrating their commitment to inclusivity and equity in practical, relational ways. This finding is illustrative in how they incorporate these beliefs into both their pedagogy and career paths, particularly by centering the needs of marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as Indigenous communities and students with disabilities. Through these shared beliefs, the lecturers align their work with broader goals of equity and support for social justice initiatives. An illustration of Ava moving into an academic career:

> *I came to [university] with the idea of earning a master's degree so I could return home and teach English, expanding my opportunities for a teaching career. In my view, teaching English was the perfect way to provide minority students with better opportunities. But then I found out that there are other ways of*

> *continuing to be a teacher. The PhD path opened up that door for me building that confidence in how I want to do it that works for me and that works for the students.*

An illustration of why Mary sustains a career in academia:

> *And it fits the other program that I teach in the Master of Education. I really want to change in that way as well, by opening up my theoretical understanding of the director, who has a very, very sensitive and specific way of dealing with topics through a social justice lens. And, you know, I really want to change and I want to broaden my understanding of those issues because I have valued a very strong decolonizing element in my courses which I have this hunger for learning new theoretical methodologies that I can then take into my own program to make the program more inclusive.*

The beliefs reflected in these narratives reveal that education is viewed as a catalyst for fostering inclusion. This focus on social justice and equity suggests that these lecturers view their roles as not merely transmitting knowledge but also addressing systemic inequities in education.

Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting orientation

Lecturers with a *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation (i.e., James, John, Sophia, and William) alternate different types of actions depending on the situation. This indicates that the same lecture could vary in approach across different scenarios and, at times, even within a single response to a particular scenario, as illustrated by John:

> *So one of the ways that I've done that was as through, you know, I went to the dean, I got some time and money for lunch and getting people together. And so they could then, as I see, start doing I suppose a SWOT analysis of what was going well on the program, what needed to happen next in terms of development [...] So for me, I think my solution is to get people talking and creating a sense of responsibility and accountability, that is very much shared and in a way that everybody is heard.*

Taking the initiative to secure resources and organize a team discussion demonstrates leadership. Encouraging an open conversation where everyone can share feedback and take responsibility fosters a collaborative and supportive space by promoting shared responsibility.

Beliefs about Responsibility and Collaboration

The lecturers with a *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation shared beliefs focused on responsibility and collaboration. Their language frequently revolved around terms like "collaborating," "responsibility," "committed," "collegiality," "together," "shared duty," "importance," and "contribute to." Their narratives demonstrate how they understand and apply these concepts, both in their interactions with students and colleagues and in their broader professional commitments. Responsibility is understood not just as a personal obligation but as a shared duty, and collaboration is framed as an essential strategy for addressing the challenges of education in today's world. In essence, these lecturers' work underscores the belief that education is most effective when it is a collaborative process rooted in shared responsibility, where all lecturers, students, and other community groups work together to achieve common educational goals. As John argues, fostering collaboration, shared responsibility, and accountability is essential to improving standards and creating better learning spaces:

> *My mantra was always that none of us are as good as all of us. You know, I used to use that in school quite often. You know, if we're working together. And what I also think happens is when you've got folk collaborating together, then you also raise expectations. And standards also rise as well, because everybody's keen to up the game, as it were. So for me, as program director, bringing folk together is putting the student learning experience at the center of everything we do.*

Additionally, William states that true educational impact requires cooperation beyond the classroom:

> *And I think, therefore, other agencies and organizations can teach young people*

> *on their own, but they can do so much more powerfully in cooperation with educators, that only works in cooperation. So there is a role for an educator here, so that not to lose sight of the educator would be a complete mistake. Yeah, but to lay the responsibility of the educational process at the door of the teacher is also absolutely a fundamental mistake.*

The underlying message is that education thrives when responsibility is shared and collaboration is embraced. The lecturers' practices reflect a fundamental belief that success in teaching, learning, and leadership is not achieved through isolated efforts but through a collective process. These narratives suggest that the path to achieving educational goals and addressing challenges lies in working together, whether among students, faculty, or the broader community emphasizing that joint effort leads to better outcomes for all involved.

Leading orientation

Lecturers with a *Leading* orientation (i.e., Amelia, Emma, and Olivia) take control, make assertive decisions, and direct others. Their actions often involve setting standards, providing clear guidance, and driving the group toward specific goals. Olivia demonstrated the Leading orientation by clearly articulating her expectations, as shown in the following statement:

> *I'm often saying, you know, we can't release the grades until we can't release grades for the whole class until you've finished your grading or something like that. So yeah, I think this is one where I would have no hesitation in bringing it up and demanding that things be done. But I think you have to again accept that there are reasons why people fail to meet deadlines, and it's often because they're under pressure. So it's finding out, trying to catch it early so that if somebody needs some guidance to get their work to manage their own workload.*

Olivia takes control of the situation by asserting that grades cannot be released until all grading is completed. She provides clear guidance, demands adherence to deadlines, and shows a willingness to address issues assertively.

Beliefs about Change and Innovation

The lecturers with a *Leading* orientation shared beliefs centered around change and innovation. Their language frequently revolves around terms like: "educational reform or change," "(organizational) development," "transformational teaching," "furthering teaching," "making impact," "creating systems," and "refining." Their narratives emphasize an ongoing commitment to transforming teaching and introducing novel approaches in response to shifting needs. By driving change through their teaching, these lecturers actively innovate within their fields, continually adapting and reimagining educational processes to ensure they remain effective and forward-thinking. Olivia, for example, stressed that she takes personal responsibility for continuously improving her teaching by refining course content and valuing a cycle of innovation.

> *I see it as my responsibility to put time and energy into the preparation of my classes and constantly look for ways to improve and innovate my teaching. […] I'm at a point with the, I mean, I completely rewrote it in the first year I taught it was just completely changed. And then, this year, I changed the learning outcomes and the assessment to fit better with each other. And next academic year, I probably want to run it pretty much as it is so that I've just got that repeat experience and then make some more judgments about how to change things.*

In addition, Emma mentioned how she aims for ensuring effective implementations of new initiatives.

> *I want to make sure the chief examiners feel supported as I initiate changes in the committees. Formalizing the process by introducing clear functions, support, and training for the chief examiners, will help everything run more smoothly. The key is for me to take the lead in organizing and guiding this transition.*

In these narratives, the lecturers reflect beliefs about change and innovation, where their leadership and teaching are driven by a commitment to transform teaching practices. Both Olivia and Emma emphasize the importance of adapting to new challenges and introducing novel approaches to enhance both teaching and learning. Lecturers with this *Leading* orientation actively engage with shifting

educational landscapes, challenging conventional models and pushing for reforms that address the evolving needs of students, lecturers, and educational systems as a whole. Their work demonstrates that innovation is not an isolated activity but a continuous process, requiring both vision and the ability to lead change.

5.4 Discussion

This study sought to explore *how* and *why* lecturers navigate challenging teaching situations. *How* refers to the agentic orientations, and *why* to lecturers' beliefs. Drawing on the ecological model of teacher agency developed by Priestley and colleagues (2015), this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how university lecturers navigate teaching practices in an agentic manner. By utilizing the typology of agentic actions (Kusters et al., under review), we examined the beliefs underlying lecturers' agentic actions, offering insights into their orientations toward challenging teaching scenarios. This approach not only maps lecturers' actions but also offers an explanatory framework for understanding the rationale behind lecturers' deliberate choices. Namely, our findings showed how lecturers' beliefs are reflected in their agentic orientations, suggesting that lecturers with similar beliefs tend to adopt similar approaches to teaching. This means that beliefs shape how lecturers perceive – or have *awareness* (Nguyen, 2020) – and respond to teaching challenges, influencing their choices and actions in practice. These beliefs act as a lens through which lecturers interpret their professional spaces, guiding their agentic orientations. Similarly, Yang and Clarke (2018) found that reflection on teaching practice revealed underlying beliefs, which enhanced teacher agency. In other words, lecturers' agentic orientations are closely tied to their belief systems, which inform their ability to navigate complex and dynamic educational contexts in a deliberate and purposeful manner.

Understanding the interplay between individual beliefs, professional goals, and systemic contexts is important for supporting lecturers as they navigate the complexities of their roles. As outlined in the introduction, university lecturers face

increasing demands to innovate teaching and address global and local challenges. These findings provide insights into the complex ways in which lecturers enact teacher agency, illuminating the various dimensions and motivations behind their actions. Rather than approaching teacher agency as a normative concept, one that invites judgment as "good" or "bad," our perspective encourages a more nuanced understanding, including how lecturers create spaces to exercise agency and the underlying beliefs and values that inform and shape their decisions. Within this space, lecturers balance diverse and often competing demands. In the subsequent discussion, each agentic orientation and the lecturers' underlying beliefs are discussed.

5.4.1 Accommodating & Supporting orientation

Lecturers with an *Accommodating* & *Supporting* orientation articulated beliefs about inclusivity in their teaching, consistently placing students' needs above personal preferences or fixed institutional structures. This approach reflects a teaching philosophy focused on flexibility and adaptability to foster inclusive educational spaces, aligning with Miller et al.'s (2020) emphasis on inclusive, agentic actions. Rather than merely reacting to challenges, these lecturers proactively adopt inclusive strategies, creating supportive, conducive spaces that encourage participation. The scoping review by Miller et al. (2020) describes how teachers in K-12 grades (ages 5-18) promote inclusion by using differentiated instruction and flexible grouping to meet diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. Teachers tend to integrate multiple learning modalities and center on students' strengths and interests. Additionally, teachers advocate for resources and policy changes to support inclusive practices, often challenging traditional, segregated schooling and deficit-based views of disability. The review highlights how teachers continually adapt their methods in response to classroom dynamics, emphasizing a flexible and responsive approach essential for creating an inclusive, supportive space. This aligns with our findings, suggesting that the observations of Miller and colleagues (2020) may hold relevance for our context. By drawing on these shared insights, we can better understand our own findings within the university context.

Moreover, the *Accommodating & Supporting* orientation observed in our study is not merely instructional tactics but is embedded in the lecturers' professional identity, shaping how they approach challenges and adapt to meet diverse needs. These orientations show that inclusivity for these lecturers extends beyond actions and becomes a core aspect of their identity as lecturers, aligning with Li and Ruppar (2021), who argue that professional development for lecturers should be structured to foster an "inclusive teacher identity," and emphasize developing a philosophy that sustains inclusivity through reflexivity.

Similarly, Pantić (2015) highlighted the role of teacher agency in promoting social justice, further reinforcing this integrated view of professional identity and inclusivity. By prioritizing students' needs over their own (accommodating) and creating an encouraging, collaborative space (supporting), lecturers demonstrate both a purposeful commitment to inclusivity and the reflective capacity to adapt within their social contexts. This integration of accommodating and supporting actions into their teaching orientation reflects the broader ethical and professional imperatives that Pantić (2015) sees as essential for fostering agency in social justice. Therefore, our findings suggest that this agentic orientation functions as a foundational mechanism for enacting inclusive beliefs, embedding these practices deeply within their professional identities and teaching philosophies in a way that is both intentional and adaptive.

5.4.2 Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting orientation

Lecturers with a *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation articulated beliefs about responsibility and collaboration in their teaching practices. These findings appear to be rooted in a perspective that emphasizes collaboration and holds that community groups bear a collective responsibility to optimize collective outcomes. Moreover, lecturers who follow this orientation see it as their duty to exhibit constructive actions when circumstances require such leadership. These beliefs about responsibility and collaboration resonate with the insights of Minett-Smith and Davis (2019), who discuss how team-teaching (i.e., a collaborative teaching approach where multiple instructors share responsibility for planning, delivering, and assessing a course) fosters a culture of shared

responsibility and mutual support among lecturers. Team-teaching requires lecturers to embrace a collective sense of duty toward both students and colleagues. This approach shifts responsibility from an individual obligation to a shared endeavor, where lecturers support one another and work collaboratively toward common educational goals, reinforcing values like "collaboration" and "collegiality" (Minett-Smith & Davis, 2019). In brief, educational goals are more effectively achieved when lecturers work collaboratively, highlighting that cohesive team engagement is essential to reaching learning objectives. These findings imply that education thrives through shared responsibility, where informal leadership and mutual accountability foster effective collaboration in teaching.

In addition, lecturers who model collaboration and leadership skills set a standard of professionalism and interpersonal effectiveness within teaching spaces, which not only enhances their own teaching approaches but also positively influences their colleagues and students (e.g., Ramsden et al., 2007). This is imperative in current trends in higher education, where collaborative, responsibility-focused teaching practices support transdisciplinary work (Eggins et al., 2021; Van Baalen et al., 2021). With a growing focus within universities on bridging disciplines to tackle complex societal issues, lecturers with a *Leading, Accommodating, & Supporting* orientation see shared responsibility as essential to effective teaching. Van Baalen et al. (2021) emphasize that transdisciplinary success hinges on mutual accountability, adaptability, and co-creation. By fostering this culture, lecturers not only improve student outcomes but also exemplify the collaborative mindset essential for addressing today's interdisciplinary challenges. This approach emphasizes that lecturers' commitment to shared responsibility is pivotal, in addition to their intention to take a leadership role in fostering collaboration at universities.

5.4.3 Leading orientation

Lecturers with a *Leading* orientation articulated beliefs about change and innovation in their teaching practices. This adds to the findings of Yang and Clarke (2018), who highlight the complexity of educational reform implementation,

emphasizing that while top-down policies set reform goals, individual teacher agency significantly influences how these reforms arrive in practice. Decisive, innovation-driven lecturers could thus be instrumental to sustainable educational reforms. Vähäsantanen et al. (2019) highlight professional agency as encompassing the capacity to influence work, engage in collaborative practices, and continuously negotiate one's professional identity. Such agency-driven behaviors position lecturers as not merely recipients of policy but as active agents capable of shaping and adapting reforms to fit the specific needs of their educational contexts. Through this agency, lecturers embody the potential for sustained, meaningful change within their institutions, facilitating reform processes that extend beyond the confines of top-down directives.

Leijen et al. (2020) expand on this by situating teacher agency within the ecological model that emphasizes the role of contextual factors and reflection, demonstrating that agency empowers lecturers to assess and transform their own practices critically. By engaging in reflective practices, lecturers adapt policies thoughtfully and reshape educational practices to better align with their evolving understanding of effective pedagogy. This capacity for reflective adaptation supports the development of lecturers as proactive leaders of change, enabling them to navigate complex educational demands and contribute meaningfully to sustained reform.

Furthermore, Cong-Lem (2024) described that lecturers' agency is integral to innovation and educational improvement. In higher education, agency is expressed through lecturers' active involvement in pedagogical innovation, curriculum redesign, and their ongoing commitment to student well-being and engagement. Effective change in this context depends on a combination of internal drive and external support structures, such as leadership encouragement. By exercising agency in this way, lecturers enact and model sustainable, transformative practices that can advance educational quality over time. In essence, leading lecturers embody a proactive and adaptable approach to educational reform, demonstrating that agency and innovation are intertwined in advancing sustainable educational practices.

5.4.4 Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study was small-scale and conducted within a single institution, which enhances the internal validity of the findings because of consistent conditions. However, this limited geographical and institutional scope restricts the generalizability of the results to broader contexts. Future research could expand to include multiple institutes and varied departments to enhance the generalizability of the findings and validate the results across a range of educational settings. A second limitation concerns the scenario-based design. The scenarios were designed to focus on a single situation, allowing participants to thoroughly analyze and deepen their reflections and articulate their beliefs and actions more clearly and deeply than perhaps they could in real life. An advantage of this approach is that it offers a focused, manageable way to explore specific aspects of teacher agency in depth. However, teaching practice typically involves navigating multiple, simultaneous challenges rather than isolated events. Consequently, participants' responses in the scenario-based approach may have been more deliberate and over-considered compared to the quick, multifaceted, and responsive decision-making required in actual teaching practice. To address this limitation, observational studies of lecturers' actual teaching practices could assess whether their responses to scenarios align with their actions in real-world settings. Mixed-methods approach, combining a scenario-based approach with observations, would further enrich the understanding of how lecturers navigate complex, authentic teaching challenges.

5.5 Conclusions

This study advances the literature on teacher agency in university settings by examining the role of beliefs in shaping agentic actions. Our findings offer an extended perspective on university teacher agency by revealing the underlying rationale that drives lecturers' agentic actions. Consistent with the temporality of teacher agency, as conceptualized by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), our

results indicate that enduring beliefs influence agentic actions in the present. This insight highlights the need to understand how past experiences and beliefs shape lecturers' current practices.

Through this study, we substantiated the interconnectedness of teacher agency and beliefs, aligning with findings from a study conducted in schools (Biesta et al., 2015). Furthermore, we extended empirical support for this relationship within university settings. Lecturers with strong beliefs about inclusivity not only hold these beliefs, but actively demonstrate them through accommodating and supporting actions. Also, lecturers who prioritize collaboration and responsibility similarly engage in actions that foster a sense of community, often taking on leadership roles to facilitate collective goals. Furthermore, lecturers who emphasize continuous improvement, particularly in the areas of change and innovation, frequently assume pioneering roles, driving forward new ideas and practices. These patterns shed light on bridging beliefs with agentic actions. By identifying the alignment between beliefs and actions, our findings suggest that beliefs are both a foundation and a catalyst for teacher agency, allowing lecturers to adapt to changing educational needs and ultimately enhancing lecturers' capacity to navigate and shape their professional landscapes.

Chapter 6

General Discussion

6.1 Compendium

In this compendium a brief overview of the rationale for this dissertation is provided, followed by the main aims and findings of each chapter. This dissertation centered on enhancing our understanding of why and how university lecturers shape and navigate their teaching practices, thereby contributing insights into teacher agency. Lecturers are expected to adapt to rapidly evolving demands, such as digitalization, the massification of education, and increasing societal expectations. Furthermore, lecturers must balance these demands while contributing to the three fundamental missions of universities: research, teaching, and service (Cummings, 1998; Macfarlane, 2010). In this complex landscape, teacher agency emerges as a critical factor that enables lecturers to navigate these challenges.

Teacher agency is essential for fostering an empowering educational culture (Cong-Lem, 2024; Reinius et al., 2022). Perhaps the most telling indicator of an institution that promotes teacher agency is the extent to which lecturers feel empowered to make decisions that affect the institution as a whole. In such spaces, lecturers not only are included in decision-making processes but also notice that their voices are valued and their contributions recognized. This perspective underscores a broader vision of what universities can achieve when they prioritize teacher agency. By empowering lecturers to contribute meaningfully to institutional goals, universities can create spaces where both lecturers and students thrive (Cong-Lem, 2021; Imants & Van der Wal, 2019). Indeed, when lecturers feel supported and autonomous in their roles, they are better positioned to inspire and enable their students to reach their full potential (cf. Van Leeuwen et al., 2022). The studies presented in this dissertation were conducted within the context of research-intensive universities, with the aim of closely examining lecturers' teacher agency and the evolving dynamics of university teaching practices. The following sections summarize the main findings from each chapter, emphasizing the contributions of the studies to the discourse on teacher agency.

Main findings per chapter

Chapter 2

In the study described in Chapter 2, the objective was to understand university lecturers' perceptions of their professional agency, particularly in their roles as change agents in teaching. The research question was: *Which characteristics of the three components of professional agency do lecturers identify in academic teaching practice?* The study focused on three components of professional agency: influencing at work, developing work practices, and negotiating professional identity, as outlined by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019). The study was conducted at a research-intensive university in the Netherlands, encompassing interviews with 35 lecturers representing diverse departments. The findings revealed that lecturers felt a high degree of autonomy in designing and delivering their courses, often perceiving this autonomy as a form of influence within their teaching practice. However, their influence rarely extended beyond individual courses to departmental or institutional levels. Lecturers valued the opportunity to innovate and tailor their teaching but often lacked structured collaboration with colleagues to foster cohesive curriculum development.

Despite valuing teaching, lecturers reported limited engagement in formal professional development beyond compulsory qualifications like the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). This was partly attributed to institutional norms prioritizing research over teaching in career advancement. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of recognition and time allocated for teaching-related innovations and collaborations. The study highlighted the need for context-specific interpretations of professional agency in the university teaching practice. Therefore, the main results adapted the three components and provided ways of strengthening the components as follows:

- Influencing University Teaching: Establishing clearer communication channels and decision-making opportunities at higher levels to enable lecturers to contribute to departmental or institutional teaching strategies.
- Developing University Teaching: Encouraging collaborative teaching practices and providing time and resources for collective curriculum development.
- Negotiating Teacher Identity: Promoting recognition of teaching excellence

and offering meaningful career development pathways for teaching-focused academics.

In conclusion, we argued that a generic model did not cover the full scope of how lecturers perceived agency, and therefore, agency should be examined in specific situations.

Chapter 3

In the study described in Chapter 3, the objective was to develop and validate scenarios to measure teacher agency in universities. The guiding research question was: *In what ways can representative scenarios be developed to measure teacher agency in universities?* The study utilized a multimethod approach encompassing four sub-studies to create a set of 23 scenarios that reflect the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher agency. These scenarios were derived from real-life teaching experiences and designed to stimulate authentic responses from participants. The design and main results per sub-study were as follows: first, interviews with 28 university lecturers from various institutions identified 24 recurring themes in teaching that require agentic responses, such as workload management and student engagement. Second, an expert panel comprising 37 educational researchers evaluated the scenarios, considering perspectives (first-person vs. third-person) and narrative styles (open-ended vs. closed-ended). The findings indicated that first-person, open-ended scenarios were most effective in promoting identification and eliciting thoughtful responses, and all scenarios were formulated that way accordingly. Third, a second expert panel of 13 specialists in higher education and/or teacher agency assessed the scenarios' potential to elicit teacher agency. This step further refined the scenarios by emphasizing clarity and alignment with the theoretical definition of agency. One scenario did not meet the requirements and was deleted. Finally, a pilot sample of 30 experienced lecturers tested the scenarios in think-aloud sessions, confirming their capacity to evoke multiple viable solutions to complex teaching challenges.

Practical and scientific implications entailed that the scenarios can be used in academic training programs to enhance self-reflection and collaborative problem-solving among lecturers. The validated scenarios serve as a reliable

instrument for future research on teacher agency, offering rich, context-sensitive insights. Insights gained from scenario-based research can inform university policies, emphasizing teaching innovation and the systemic support required to foster teacher agency. The final set of scenarios captured key elements of teacher agency, including having multiple options in varying scenarios that elicit deliberate decision-making. Overall, this study provided a contextually grounded approach to exploring and eliciting teacher agency within the dynamic university landscape.

Chapter 4

In the study described in Chapter 4, the objective was to explore how university lecturers demonstrate teacher agency through specific agentic actions. For this study, the research question was: *What agentic actions do university lecturers articulate in the context of teaching?* Using the scenarios from Chapter 3, scenario-based interviews were conducted with 30 lecturers from nine research-intensive universities in the Netherlands. With this study, a typology of agentic actions was developed, categorizing actions into three types: Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting. The ecological model of teacher agency served as the theoretical framework, with a particular focus on the practical-evaluative dimension, which includes cultural, structural, and material elements. The findings revealed that university lecturers demonstrate agency in nuanced ways, indicating that various actions taken to address challenging situations can be considered agentic. The typology of agentic actions includes Leading actions, which involve assertive decision-making and proactive strategies aimed at influencing teaching practices and institutional policies. Leading actions manifest culturally through sharing teaching experiences to inspire colleagues, setting behavioral standards, and fostering open communication; structurally through advocating for policy changes and reducing bureaucracy to streamline teaching processes; and materially through innovations such as course redesign, securing resources, and managing workloads effectively. The typology of agentic actions also includes Accommodating actions, which focus on flexibility and prioritizing the needs of students and colleagues over personal preferences. Accommodating actions manifest

culturally through demonstrating empathy and sensitivity to students' personal and academic needs; structurally through adjusting deadlines or procedures to support inclusivity while maintaining fairness; and materially through adapting teaching methods and leveraging resources to address classroom challenges. The typology of agentic actions further includes Supporting actions, which are aimed at fostering collaborative and conducive learning spaces. Supporting actions manifest culturally through encouraging mutual respect and promoting academic engagement among students; structurally through providing additional opportunities for assessments or modifying institutional policies for student benefit; and materially through enhancing educational methods, utilizing digital tools, and prioritizing professional development for continuous improvement. The study highlights the interplay of cultural, structural, and material dimensions in shaping lecturers' agentic actions, emphasizing the dynamic nature of teacher agency in response to challenging teaching practices. We stressed the importance of recognizing and fostering teacher agency in universities to create adaptive and innovative teaching spaces.

Chapter 5

In the study described in Chapter 5, the objective was to examine how university lecturers' beliefs inform their agentic orientations when navigating teaching practices in challenging contexts. The research question was: *What shared beliefs about teaching do university lecturers express, and how are these reflected in their agentic orientations?* We conducted interview sessions with 12 lecturers from a Scottish university, employing a scenario-based approach with validated teaching scenarios (Chapter 3) to elicit responses, while also using semi-structured interviews to investigate the iterational and projective dimensions of the ecological model. The findings identified three distinct agentic orientations: Accommodating & Supporting, Leading, Accommodating & Supporting, and Leading. These orientations align with specific shared beliefs about teaching, rooted in inclusivity, collaboration, responsibility, and innovation. The key findings of the study revealed three distinct orientations among lecturers. The Accommodating & Supporting Orientation was characterized by a strong

focus on inclusivity and equity, with lecturers adapting their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students. Their beliefs were rooted in fostering inclusive educational spaces and addressing systemic inequities, demonstrating a deep commitment to social justice. In practice, they supported students by extending deadlines or adapting assessment methods to ensure equitable opportunities. The Leading, Accommodating & Supporting Orientation combined leadership with collaboration, emphasizing shared responsibility and collective accountability. Lecturers with this orientation valued community and teamwork among colleagues and students, advocating for resources, organizing collaborative forums, and addressing systemic challenges through collective efforts. Lastly, the Leading Orientation was marked by a focus on driving change and innovation, with lecturers demonstrating assertiveness and decision-making in teaching scenarios. Within this Leading Orientation, lecturers' beliefs centered on advancing educational practices and fostering impactful teaching reforms, which translated into actions such as curriculum redesign, refining learning outcomes, and implementing systemic changes to enhance teaching quality. Overall, the study provides insights into how the interplay of beliefs and actions shapes teacher agency, offering guidance on fostering inclusive, collaborative, and innovative teaching practices in the university context.

The main findings of the four studies described above highlight the multifaceted nature of teacher agency, with each study offering unique insights from a university perspective. Together, the studies deepen our understanding of how university lecturers exercise agency to shape teaching practices and enhance the quality of their teaching. The integration of theoretical, methodological, and practical insights provides an in-depth understanding of teacher agency as a dynamic and context-dependent concept. In the following sections, the findings are discussed in light of the overarching aim of this dissertation: understanding teacher agency through the exploration of why and how university lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices. First, the main themes for understanding teacher agency, as derived from the contributions of the four studies, are discussed. These include the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher agency, the underlying beliefs of lecturers' actions, how agency is exercised from an ecological perspective, and

the recognition of spaces for agency. Then, the limitations of this dissertation are addressed, along with directions for future research. Finally, the necessity of teacher agency in universities is emphasized, challenging the state of the art by advocating for a more comprehensive recognition of lecturers' teaching quality.

6.2 Understanding teacher agency

The studies presented in Chapters 2–5 aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of teacher agency from a university perspective. To understand teacher agency, we investigated *why* and *how* lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices. How lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices was investigated by agentic manifestations. In Chapter 2, we identified manifestations of professional agency, all related to a specific event at a specific time. From this we concluded that lecturers expressed their sense of agency primarily in context-specific situations. This suggested that agency can vary across situations and personal experiences because individuals interpret and enact agency within the specific contexts in which they work (cf. Molla & Nolan, 2020). Similarly, Annala et al. (2021) found that teachers' professional agency is shaped by both their individual capacities and broader institutional and societal structures. Factors such as formal professional roles influence how agency is perceived and exercised. Thus, lecturers' enactment of agency depends on their perception and interpretation of possibilities within a specific context.

To account for the situational nature of agency, 23 scenarios based on challenging teaching scenarios were developed in Chapter 3. These scenarios prompted lecturers to enact agency in response to teaching-specific situations, allowing subsequent studies (as in Chapter 4 and 5) to gain an in-depth understanding of how lecturers exercised agency. Chapter 4, in which we adopted an "etic" perspective, demonstrated the nuanced and context-dependent nature of agentic actions. The findings revealed that various deliberate strategies used to navigate challenging teaching situations could be considered agentic actions. For instance, Accommodating and Supporting actions tend to be more receptive

and auxiliary, whereas Leading actions are more prescriptive. Despite these different appearances, all three types could qualify as agentic actions, as long as they are deliberately undertaken with clear intent to enhance the strategies and approaches that support the wider goals of teaching practice (Priestley et al., 2015). The variety of appearances of actions indicates that teacher agency can only be comprehensively understood through a dynamic and context-dependent perspective, considering why and how actions are taken (cf. Cong-Lem, 2021; Priestley et al., 2015; Van Vijfeijken et al., 2024). Moreover, the study described in Chapter 5, which adopted an "emic" perspective, deepened the understanding of teacher agency by exploring how individual lecturers employ different agentic actions across various challenging teaching situations. The findings revealed that lecturers adapted their actions based on the specific situation and their intended goals. This highlights that agency emerges through a dynamic interplay between individual beliefs and situational conditions, reinforcing the notion that it is contextually situated. These insights further support the argument that teacher agency is not a fixed trait, but a dynamic process shaped by both personal and contextual factors. Additionally, the findings from Chapter 5 align with Biesta et al.'s (2015) perspective, which conceptualizes agency as an emergent phenomenon arising from the interaction between actors and their environments, rather than a solely individual capacity.

As mentioned, in addition to investigating how lecturers shape and navigate teaching practices, we were also interested in why they do so. The *why* was examined by measuring lecturers' considerations when navigating challenging teaching situations. By shaping teaching practices in an agentic manner, lecturers respond to a complex interplay of personal, structural, and situational factors. The multifaceted nature of this process raises a fundamental question: "*Agency for what?*" (Priestley et al., 2012). Addressing this question is essential to understanding why agency is exercised in a particular form in a particular context. The findings from Chapter 5 illustrate that lecturers' agentic orientations (i.e. how they act in a particular way) stem from underlying beliefs (i.e. why they act in a particular way). These agentic orientations with underlying beliefs stress that agency cannot be understood without incorporating the purpose of actions:

agency for what? To understand the emergence and manifestations of agency requires knowledge of what agency is exercised for (cf. Priestley et al., 2012).

In an era of rapid transformation – characterized by advancements in artificial intelligence, intensifying global competition, and budget cuts in higher education and research – the capacity of lecturers to shape and navigate teaching practices is vital (Eggins et al., 2021). Understanding the underlying beliefs that guide lecturers' actions can facilitate support for strengthening lecturers' capacity to navigate the sometimes conflicting priorities of universities and their personal beliefs.

6.3 Empirical insights from a university perspective into the ecological model of teacher agency

As discussed above, investigating teacher agency requires considering the purpose behind lecturers' actions and how agency is exercised. Following the ecological model of teacher agency, agency is shaped by the interaction between lecturers and their professional practices, influenced by factors such as institutional structures, available resources, and personal and collective intentions (Priestley et al., 2015). To grasp the multifaceted nature of teacher agency, investigating both the actions of lecturers as well as the considerations for those actions is necessary. To address this, Chapter 3 presented scenarios based on challenging teaching situations designed to elicit and examine teacher agency from an ecological perspective. Lecturers' responses to these scenarios provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics and underlying intentions of exercising agency. A scenario-based approach aligns with the definition of the ecological approach of teacher agency, which includes the notion of a dynamic and context-dependent concept by explicating the situational aspects of teaching. Following the ecological model of teacher agency, agency is an outcome of a decision-making process that is informed by prior experiences, current available resources, and future aspirations (Priestley et al., 2015). To this end, we used the definition of the ecological perspective on teacher agency formulated by Priestley et al. (2015):

> "(…) *teachers achieve agency when they are able to choose between different options in any given situation and are able to judge which option is most desirable, in the light of the wider purposes of the practice in and through which they act. Agency is restricted if those options are limited. Agency is not present if there are no options for actions or if the teacher simply follows routinized patterns of habitual behavior with no consideration of alternatives*" (p. 141).

The scenarios facilitate an exploration of lecturers' intentional decision-making, to evaluate goals and purposes, and act upon meaningful alternatives within challenging teaching situations.

The main findings in Chapters 2–5 suggest that agency involves lecturers shaping and navigating teaching practices by deliberate decision-making and identifying opportunities to expand the spaces in which agency is exercised. The latter suggests that achieving teacher agency is a process of agency development (cf. Heikonen et al., 2020; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rushton & Bird, 2024). For example, the participants in the study described in Chapter 2 highlighted that, while considerable autonomy and ownership were experienced in their work, uncertainty existed about how to exert influence beyond immediate teaching contexts. The lecturers in this example could be supported in expanding their affordances in which they can exercise agency (cf. De Boer et al., 2019), which would allow them to transcend their autonomy and ownership in their own practice to influence policy. In this way, lecturers could utilize their agency to become agents of change in educational innovation (Ketelaar et al., 2012) and in shaping institutional structures (Annala et al., 2021). The ecological model of teacher agency by Priestley et al. (2015) provides a comprehensive framework by considering individual, relational, and contextual influences on agency. However, its broad scope can also be a limitation, as it risks becoming overly abstract, making it difficult to pinpoint the most critical factors for fostering teacher agency or to translate these factors into concrete, actionable steps in educational settings. To address this, we validated the model by eliciting actions from the practical-evaluative dimension, providing empirical substance from a university perspective. This validation could be of added value for researchers, as

it ensures that the ecological model is grounded in real-world practices, making the model more robust and applicable across diverse educational contexts. Thus, the results from this dissertation strengthen Priestley et al.'s (2015) model by bridging the gap between theory and practice, as explored in Chapters 3–5. As a result, the typology of actions presented in Chapter 4 can serve as a tool for lecturers, enabling them to gain deeper insights into how their decisions, beliefs, and professional contexts interact. By reflecting on their own actions, as suggested by Leijen et al. (2020), lecturers can recognize and expand spaces for exercising agency to shape and navigate teaching practices.

Recognizing spaces for teacher agency development

Building on the ecological model, reflective practices play a pivotal role in enabling lecturers to actively develop and strengthen their agency (Leijen et al., 2020). As Imants and Van der Wal (2019) argue, professional development is deeply rooted in the specific contexts in which it is enacted, underscoring the interplay between individual actions and systemic influences. The typology of agentic actions (Chapter 4) offers a lens to analyze and enhance lecturers' reflective practices. Knowing what types of actions constitute agency allows lecturers to situate their practices within a broader understanding of how agency is achieved across cultural, structural, and material contexts. The typology of actions described in Chapter 4 equips lecturers with a shared language and conceptual clarity to identify, evaluate, and refine professional actions in a purposeful and systematic manner. Reflections on lecturers' agentic actions help identify gaps or imbalances in their approach (Leijen et al., 2020). By utilizing the typology of agentic actions, lecturers can critically reflect on how their decisions align with their objectives and beliefs (as shown in Chapter 5) while recognizing the interplay between these choices and the challenges they navigate. Such a typology encourages intentionality, empowering lecturers to deliberately choose actions that harmonize with their aspirations and the needs of the situation (Code, 2020). For instance, by reflecting on agentic actions using the typology, lecturers might realize that Leading actions such as curriculum reform could be strengthened by integrating Supporting actions to foster collaboration

among colleagues. Similarly, Accommodating actions might be reconsidered not only as responses to immediate needs but as opportunities to advocate for structural changes that encourage inclusivity on a systemic level. In this way, the typology serves as a reflective scaffold, helping lecturers critically assess how their actions contribute to or hinder their teacher agency. This aligns with Jay and Johnson's (2002) presentation of a typology of reflective practice as a tool for teacher educators to critically analyze actions and professional roles. It ensures that reflection is not an abstract exercise, but a focused process tied to concrete, categorized actions that illustrate the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of agency (Hegarty, 2013). The typology, as a reflective tool, can support lecturers in identifying spaces to exercise teacher agency in navigating the complexities of teaching practice (Toom et al., 2021).

Spaces of agency can be seen as situations where teachers identify and even create opportunities to exercise their agency (Rushton & Bird, 2024). This enhances the ecological perspective by describing mechanisms underlying agency and agency development. We argue that the capacity of lecturers to *recognize* and *respond* to spaces for deliberate action, shaped by the iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions, is central to developing and exercising teacher agency. This perspective emphasizes the developmental process of improving teacher agency and the context-specific nature of exercising agency. By recognizing, expanding, and creating spaces of agency, lecturers' capacity to act meaningfully within professional contexts is enhanced (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rushton & Bird, 2024). Through reflective practices that illuminate how agency can be enacted, lecturers become more attuned to the affordances within their teaching practices (Aspbury-Miyanishi, 2022; De Boer et al., 2019). The notion that agency is not only exercised in-situ, but also involves recognizing and expanding spaces within professional contexts, means that agency can be cultivated and developed. This understanding provokes professional development activities aimed at developing teacher agency. This is discussed in more detail in the section *On the necessity of teacher agency in universities*, following the *Limitations and directions for future research*.

6.4 Limitations and directions for future research

This dissertation acknowledges several limitations, namely 1) context-specific focus, 2) lack of longitudinal research, and 3) limited insights into classroom practices. The studies were conducted within specific institutional and cultural contexts (e.g., research-intensive universities in the Netherlands and Scotland). While these settings provide rich insights into teacher agency, the findings may not fully generalize to other institutional, cultural, or geographic contexts. Future research could explore how various context characteristics can have an influence on the manifestation of agency in universities by identifying similar context characteristics based on university cultures, educational systems, and national policies.

Second, this dissertation employed cross-sectional research designs, limiting the ability to capture changes in teacher agency over time. Longitudinal studies would enable an exploration of the developmental trajectory of agency, examining how it is cultivated, developed, and sustained through various stages of an academic career.

Third, while this dissertation offers a theoretical and systemic view of teacher agency, it provides less detailed insights into its enactment within actual classroom settings. Although the scenarios utilized in this dissertation reflect the university teaching practice, they remain a simulated reality when used for research. Further research could delve into the micro-level dynamics of teacher agency in real-life teaching practices, incorporating direct observations and student perspectives.

6.5 On the necessity of teacher agency in universities

An important implication of the findings in this dissertation is the need for policymakers and institutional leaders to critically evaluate how lecturers are recognized, rewarded, and supported in their contributions to teaching and professional development. Current university systems often emphasize quantifiable outputs, such as research publications or student enrollment

numbers, at the expense of more nuanced contributions, such as innovative teaching practices, mentorship, and community engagement. Policymakers should consider how to better align reward structures with the multifaceted roles lecturers play in advancing institutional missions (VSNU et al., 2019). This alignment would not only enhance teacher agency but also promote a more holistic approach to academic excellence. In this final section, we argue the pivotal role of teacher agency in redefining the evaluation and professional development of university lecturers.

The necessity of teacher agency for developing university teaching was argued in this dissertation. Through four empirical studies, this dissertation provides, besides theoretical insights, practical insights into how teacher agency can transform university teaching. Lecturers often find themselves navigating practices dominated by metrics, performance targets, and bureaucratic policies (Kenny, 2017). These factors, while intended to ensure quality and accountability, can sometimes constrain the creative and reflective dimensions of teaching. Appreciation for lecturers should be much more focused on their contributions and efforts to the development of teaching practices, with appreciation focused on content and pedagogical considerations rather than numbers. As the university landscape continues to evolve, the role of teacher agency becomes more important in ensuring that universities remain spaces of innovation, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. By embracing teacher agency, institutions can move beyond rigid metrics and foster a more human-centered approach to education, one that aligns with the beliefs, motivations and aspirations of lecturers. In doing so, universities can cultivate a space where lecturers thrive and are empowered to support students in developing into academic achievers and critical thinkers (Van der Rijst, 2024).

6.6 Rethinking teacher quality

As discussed in the General Introduction (Chapter 1), the evaluation of teaching and lecturers in universities has traditionally relied on Student Evaluation of

Teaching (SET) ratings. While lecturers often use these evaluations primarily as a personal tool for course improvement, as exemplified in Chapters 2 and 4, SET ratings alone are insufficient in capturing the multifaceted nature of teaching. SET fails to capture the complexities and dimensions of what constitutes genuine teaching excellence (Spooren et al., 2013; Uttl et al., 2017). Instead, we argue that teacher agency represents a far more accurate and meaningful measure of teacher quality.

SET ratings are widely critiqued for their inability to provide a reliable measure of the quality of teaching. Numerous empirical studies reveal that SET is primarily influenced by factors unrelated to teaching quality, such as gender biases and even the lecturers' physical appearance (MacNell et al., 2015). SET is used as a summative evaluation tool, whereas a formative approach would be more beneficial for the professional development of lecturers and the overall improvement of education. Namely, SET fails to address the broader goals of education, such as fostering mentorship, promoting critical thinking, and creating inclusive learning environments (Kember & McNaught, 2007). Its focus is often limited to superficial indicators of student satisfaction, neglecting the nuanced and multifaceted nature of teaching. Contextual factors such as subject matter, class size, level of instruction, and student diversity are similarly overlooked, further undermining SET's validity (Spooren et al., 2013). By shifting the focus from SET to teacher agency, evaluations can more accurately reflect the qualities that define effective teaching.

Evaluating teacher agency addresses the critical shortcomings of SET by shifting the focus from superficial satisfaction metrics to meaningful measures of teaching quality. Unlike SET, which often fails to provide actionable feedback, assessments of teacher agency recognize the complexity and depth of effective teaching. The scenario-based instrument developed in Chapter 3 offers a practical and university-specific tool to explore and measure teacher agency based on real-life teaching situations. These scenarios capture authentic *bumpy moments* in university teaching, allowing lecturers to reflect on their professional decision-making processes and consider multiple pathways for action. Assessments rooted in teacher agency promote authentic teaching quality by focusing on the core

attributes of teaching, such as adaptability, innovation, and leadership (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015). By engaging with scenario-based reflections, lecturers consider *why* and *how* they shape their teaching practices, offering a more nuanced understanding of their agency in different educational contexts. These reflections not only provide a deeper insight into teaching dynamics but also minimize the influence of subjective judgments, fostering a more objective and comprehensive evaluation process. Additionally, formative and actionable feedback could be derived from reflections on teacher agency, which supports lecturers in their ongoing development and aligns evaluation processes with broader institutional priorities, such as fostering inclusion, mentorship, and critical thinking skills.

The shift from mere SET to evaluations of teacher agency as a measure of quality requires a paradigm shift away from the dominance of quantifiable metrics. Instead, these evaluations should be formative, emphasizing innovation and contributions to educational development. An essential component is providing lecturers with opportunities to articulate their teaching philosophies, achievements, and goals through self-reflection. This process is enriched by formative feedback from students, colleagues, and educational leaders, offering insights into the diverse spaces where lecturers make an impact (whether in the classroom, student experience, peer collaboration, curriculum development, or the broader institution) to do justice to the complex, multifaceted nature of university teaching practices.

6.7 In conclusion

Teacher agency, as a framework for evaluating lecturers, provides an authentic, holistic, and actionable measure of teacher quality. By supporting lecturers' teacher agency in universities, institutions can recognize and reward lecturers in all aspects of their teaching roles and align evaluations with the core goals of universities. Teaching is a multifaceted endeavor, requiring a combination of innovation, adaptability, leadership, and a commitment to enhance teaching

practice and its conditions. Future research should continue to explore strategies for fostering teacher agency, ensuring that lecturers are equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing academic landscape. Recognizing, identifying, and creating space to pursue the desired direction is a genuine quality.

The studies conducted in this dissertation emphasized the importance of understanding why and how lecturers make decisions in challenging teaching situations. This in-depth exploration of teacher agency highlighted the multidimensional nature, context-dependent dynamics, and the diverse ways in which teacher agency is manifested and exercised. Through four studies on teacher agency, this dissertation has contributed to an improved understanding of the landscape of university teaching, offering empirical insights into why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices. Ultimately, changing winds are an inherent part of the university realm, yet it is the lecturers' capacity to set the sails that determine the direction of university teaching.

References

Adams, M., & Rytmeister, C. (2001). Beginning the academic career: How can it best be supported in the changing university climate? In L. Richardson & J. Lidstone (Eds.), *Flexible learning for a flexible society: Refereed proceedings of the ASET/HERDSA 2000 joint international conference* (pp. 20-29). Australian Society for Educational Technology and Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Ahn, J., Nguyen, H., & Campos, F. (2021). From visible to understandable: Designing for teacher agency in education data visualizations. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education Journal, 21*(1). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1288200

Amerstorfer, C. M., & Von Münster-Kistner, C. F. (2021). Student perceptions of academic engagement and student-teacher relationships in problem-based learning. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12.* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713057

Andreescu, L. (2009). Foundations of academic freedom: Making new sense of some aging arguments. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 28*(6), 499–515. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-009-9142-6

Annala, J., Lindén, J., Mäkinen, M., & Henriksson, J. (2021). Understanding academic agency in curriculum change in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1881772

Aspbury-Miyanishi, E. (2022). The affordances beyond what one does: Reconceptualizing teacher agency with Heidegger and ecological psychology. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 113,* 103662. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103662

Ball, S. J. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-Spy guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 60*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2011.650940

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1

Biesta, G. (2022). The school is not a learning environment: How language matters for the practical study of educational practices. *Studies in Continuing Education, 44*(2), 336–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2022.2046556

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 21*(6), 624–640. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2018). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers' talk for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 49*(1), 38–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.1205143

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 39*(2), 132–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545

Boud, D., & Brew, A. (2013). Reconceptualising academic work as professional practice: Implications for academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development, 18*(3), 208–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2012.671771

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511812507 (Original work published 1972)

Bradley, R. A., & Terry, M. E. (1952). Rank analysis of incomplete block designs: I. The method of paired comparisons. *Biometrika, 39*(3/4), 324. https://doi.org/10.2307/2334029

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18*(3), 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Brodie, K. (2019). Teacher agency in professional learning communities. *Professional Development in Education,* 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1689523

Campbell, C. M., & O'Meara, K. (2013). Faculty agency: Departmental contexts that matter in faculty careers. *Research in Higher Education, 55*(1), 49–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-013-9303-x

Code, J. (2020). Agency for learning: Intention, motivation, self-efficacy and self-regulation. *Frontiers in Education, 5.* https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00019

Comproved. (2022, September 5). *Assess quick and fair with the Comparing tool - Comproved.* https://comproved.com/en/comparing-tool/

Cong-Lem, N. (2021). Teacher agency: A systematic review of international literature. *Issues in Educational Research, 31*(3), 718–738. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.190851857034060

Cong-Lem, N. (2024). Teacher agency for change and development in higher education: A scoping literature review. *International Journal of Educational Reform.* https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879231224744

Cummings, W. K. (1998). The Service University in Comparative Perspective. *Higher Education*, *35*(1), 1–8. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3448330

Dall'Alba, G. (2005). Improving teaching: Enhancing ways of being university teachers. *Higher Education Research & Development, 24*(4), 361–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360500284771

Datnow, A. (2012). Teacher agency in educational reform: Lessons from social networks research. *American Journal of Education, 119*(1), 193–201. https://doi.org/10.1086/667708

De Boer, E., Janssen, F. J. J. M., Dam, M., & Van Driel, J. H. (2019). Ontwikkeling van agency van docenten-in-opleiding: Een ecologisch perspectief [Development of preservice teacher agency: An ecological perspective], *Pedagogische Studiën*, *96*(6), 354-377. https://pedagogischestudien.nl/download?type=document&identifier=709570

Dias, D. (2014). Has massification of higher education led to more equity? Clues to a reflection on Portuguese education arena. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 19*(2), 103–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2013.788221

Durrant, J. (2019). Professional development, identity and agency. In *Teacher agency, professional development and school improvement* (pp. 41-61). Routledge.

Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International Journal of Educational Research, 43*(3), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2006.06.010

Eggins, L. H., Smolentseva, A., & De Wit, H. (2021). *Higher education in the next decade: Global challenges, future prospects.* Brill. https://brill.com/view/title/60139

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology, 103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294

Engeström, Y. (2011). From design experiments to formative interventions. *Theory & Psychology, 21*(5), 598–628. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354311419252

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review, 10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2014). Identity and agency in professional learning. In S. Billett, C. Harteis & H. Gruber (Eds.), *International handbook of research in professional and practice-based learning* (pp. 645–672). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8902-8_24

Evans, K. (2017). Bounded agency in professional lives. In *Agency at work* (pp. 17-36). Springer, Cham.

Evans, M. (2020). Navigating the neoliberal university: Reflecting on teaching practice as a teacher-researcher-trade unionist. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 41*(4), 574–590. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2020.1748572

Ferman, T. (2002). Academic professional development practice: What lecturers find valuable. *The International Journal for Academic Development, 7*(2), 146–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144032000071305

Fernández, A., Gómez, B., Binjaku, K., & Meçe, E. K. (2023). Digital transformation initiatives in higher education institutions: A multivocal literature review. *Education and Information Technologies, 28*(10), 12351–12382. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11544-0

Finch, J. (1987). The vignette technique in survey research. *Sociology, 21*(1), 105–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038587021001008

Furlong, J. (2012). Globalisation, neoliberalism, and the reform of teacher education in England. *The Educational Forum, 77*(1), 28–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2013.739017

Ghamrawi, N., Shal, T., & Ghamrawi, N. A. R. (2024). Department heads' professional agency: investigating self-perceptions and deans' perspectives through vignette-based analysis. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2405559

Ghiasvand, F., Jahanbakhsh, A. A., & Sharifpour, P. (2023). Designing and validating an assessment agency questionnaire for EFL teachers: An ecological perspective. *Language Testing in Asia, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-023-00255-z

Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The ecological approach to visual perception.* Houghton Mifflin.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration.* Polity Press.

Gilpin, L. S., & Liston, D. D. (2009). Transformative education in the scholarship of teaching and learning: An analysis of SOTL literature. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 3*(2). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2009.030211

Giroux, H. A. (2010). Bare pedagogy and the scourge of neoliberalism: Rethinking higher education as a democratic public sphere. *The Educational Forum, 74*(3), 184–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2010.483897

Gokpinar-Shelton, E., & Pike, G. R. (2021). Strategies to boost international student success in US higher education: An analysis of direct and indirect effects of learning communities. *Higher Education, 84*(2), 279–297. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00767-8

Gonzales, L. D. (2015). Faculty agency in striving university contexts: Mundane yet powerful acts of agency. *British Educational Research Journal, 41*(2), 303-323. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3140

Gould, D. (1996). Using vignettes to collect data for nursing research studies: How valid are the findings? *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 5*(4), 207–212. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.1996.tb00253.x

Green, C., Mynhier, L., Banfill, J., Edwards, P., Kim, J., & Desjardins, R. (2020). Preparing education for the crises of tomorrow: A framework for adaptability. *International Review of Education, 66*(5–6), 857–879. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09878-3

Green, C., & Pappa, S. (2020). EFL teacher education in Finland: Manifestations of professional agency in teacher educators' work. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 65*(4), 552–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1739128

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 29*(2). https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02766777

Guerra, A., Chen, J., Du, X., Nielsen, H., & Kørnøv, L. (2024). Teacher's agency in education for sustainable development: An East-West collaborative Erasmus programme using Q methodology. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 25*(9), 155–176. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijshe-05-2023-0155

Hadar, L. L., & Benish-Weisman, M. (2018). Teachers' agency: Do their values make a difference? *British Educational Research Journal, 45*(1), 137–160. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3489

Hegarty, B. (2013). *A framework to guide professional learning and reflective practice* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wollongong). https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uow.27660237.v1

Heikonen, L., Pietarinen, J., Toom, A., Soini, T., & Pyhältö, K. (2020). The development of student teachers' sense of professional agency in the classroom during teacher education. *Learning: Research and Practice, 6*(2), 114–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/23735082.2020.1725603

Hendry, G. D., & Dean, S. J. (2002). Accountability, evaluation of teaching and expertise in higher education. *International Journal for Academic Development, 7*(1), 75–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/13601440210156522

Hinostroza-Paredes, Y. (2021). Reflexivity and agency in university-based teacher educators: A critical realist analysis. *Teaching in Higher Education, 1*–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1943651

Hiver, P., & Whitehead, G. E. K. (2018). Sites of struggle: Classroom practice and the complex dynamic entanglement of language teacher agency and identity. *System, 79*, 70–80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.04.015

Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn? *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(3), 235–266. https://doi.org/10.1023/b:edpr.0000034022.16470.f3

Hornstein, H. A. (2017). Student evaluations of teaching are an inadequate assessment tool for evaluating faculty performance. *Cogent Education, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1304016

Huat, C. M., & Shunmugam, K. (2021). Every teacher a changemaker: Reflections on teacher agency and empowerment. *The English Teacher, 50*(2). https://doi.org/10.52696/FWYM7144

Hughes, R., & Huby, M. (2002). The application of vignettes in social and nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 37*(4), 382–386. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02100.x

Hughes, R., & Huby, M. (2004). The construction and interpretation of scenarios in social research. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review, 11*(1), 36–51. https://doi.org/10.1921/17466105.11.1.36

Imants, J., & Van der Wal, M. M. (2019). A model of teacher agency in professional development and school reform. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 52*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1604809

Jääskelä, P., Häkkinen, P., & Rasku-Puttonen, H. (2017). Supporting and constraining factors in the development of university teaching experienced by teachers. *Teaching in Higher Education, 22*(6), 655–671. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1273206

Jay, J. K., & Johnson, K. L. (2002). Capturing complexity: A typology of reflective practice for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 18*(1), 73–85. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(01)00051-8

Jeffries, C., & Maeder, D. W. (2005). Using Vignettes to Build and Assess Teacher Understanding of Instructional Strategies. *The Professional Educator*, *27*, 17–28. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ728478.pdf

Jenkins, G. (2019). Teacher agency: The effects of active and passive responses to curriculum change. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 47*(1), 167–181. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00334-2

Kember, D., & McNaught, C. (2007). *Enhancing university teaching: Lessons from research into award-winning teachers.* Routledge.

Kenny, J. (2017). Re-empowering academics in a corporate culture: An exploration of workload and performativity in a university. *Higher Education, 75*(2), 365–380. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0143-z

Ketelaar, E., Beijaard, D., Boshuizen, H. P., & Den Brok, P. J. (2012). Teachers' positioning towards an educational innovation in the light of ownership, sense-making, and agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(2), 273–282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.10.004

Koeslag-Kreunen, M., Van den Bossche, P., Van der Klink, M. R., & Gijselaers, W. H. (2020). Vertical or shared? When leadership supports team learning for educational change. *Higher Education, 82*(1), 19–37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00620-4

Kreber, C., & Cranton, P. (2000). Exploring the scholarship of teaching. *The Journal of Higher Education, 71*(4), 476–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2000.11778846

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Admiraal, W., & Van der Rijst, R. (2024). Developing Scenarios for Exploring Teacher Agency in Universities: A Multimethod Study. *Frontline Learning Research, 12*(2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v12i2.1419

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Rushton, E. A. C., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (under review). *Exploring teacher agency in universities: Three types of agentic actions.* Leiden University.

Kusters, M., Van der Rijst, R., De Vetten, A., & Admiraal, W. (2023). University lecturers as change agents: How do they perceive their professional agency? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 127,* 104097. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104097

Lakeman, R., Coutts, R., Hutchinson, M., Massey, D., Nasrawi, D., Fielden, J., & Lee, M. (2022). Stress, distress, disorder and coping: The impact of anonymous student evaluation of teaching on the health of higher education teachers. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 47*(8), 1489–1500. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2022.2060936

Lau, J., Vähäsantanen, K., & Collin, K. (2023). The change and continuity of teachers' professional agency: A two-year longitudinal study in the case of Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education,* 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2023.2283368

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press.

Lefstein, A., Louie, N., Segal, A., & Becher, A. (2020). Taking stock of research on teacher collaborative discourse: Theory and method in a nascent field. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 88,* 102954. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102954

Leijen, Ä., Pedaste, M., & Baucal, A. (2021). Assessing student teachers' agency and using it for predicting commitment to teaching. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 45*(5), 600–616. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1889507

Leijen, Ä., Pedaste, M., & Baucal, A. (2024). A new psychometrically validated questionnaire for assessing teacher agency in eight dimensions across pre-service and in-service teachers. *Frontiers in Education, 9.*https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1336401

Leijen, Ä., Pedaste, M., & Lepp, L. (2020). Teacher agency following the ecological model: How it is achieved and how it could be strengthened by different types of reflection. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 68*(3), 295-310. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1672855

Li, L., & Ruppar, A. (2021). Conceptualizing teacher agency for inclusive education: A systematic and international review. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 44*(1), 42–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406420926976

Lipponen, L., & Kumpulainen, K. (2011). Acting as accountable authors: Creating interactional spaces for agency work in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(5), 812-819. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.01.001

Louws, M., Zwart, R., Zuiker, I., Meijer, P. C., Oolbekkink-Marchand, H., Schaap, H., & Van der Want, A. (2020). Exploring school leaders' dilemmas in response to tensions related to teacher professional agency. *Professional Development in Education, 46*(4), 691–710. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1787203

Luce, R. D. (1959). *Individual choice behavior: A theoretical analysis.* John Wiley.

Lynch, K., & Ivancheva, M. P. (2016). Academic freedom and the commercialisation of universities: A critical ethical analysis. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics, 15*(1), 71–85. https://doi.org/10.3354/esep00160

Macfarlane, B. (2010). The Morphing of Academic Practice: Unbundling and the Rise of the Para-academic. *Higher Education Quarterly, 65*(1), 59–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00467.x

MacNell, L., Driscoll, A., & Hunt, A. N. (2015). What's in a name: Exposing gender bias in student ratings of teaching. *Innovative Higher Education, 40*(4), 291–303. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-014-9313-4

Martin, A. J., & Dowson, M. (2009). Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(1), 327–365. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325583

Marshall, S. (2023). Massification and quality of higher education: Transforming quality enhancement of teaching and learning. In *Research handbook on the transformation of higher education* (pp. 268–280). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800378216.00028

Miller, A. L., Wilt, C. L., Allcock, H. C., Kurth, J. A., Morningstar, M. E., & Ruppar, A. L. (2020). Teacher agency for inclusive education: An international scoping review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26*(12), 1159–1177. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1789766

Minett-Smith, C., & Davis, C. L. (2019). Widening the discourse on team-teaching in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 25*(5), 579–594. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1577814

Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2020). Teacher agency and professional practice. *Teachers and Teaching, 26*(1), 67-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1740196

Nguyen, H. B. (2020). Lecturers' beliefs and agency about active learning in English for specific purposes classes. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 19*(3), 86–105. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.3.6

Norton, L., Richardson, T. E., Hartley, J., Newstead, S., & Mayes, J. (2005). Teachers' beliefs and intentions concerning teaching in higher education. *Higher Education, 50*(4), 537–571. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6363-z

Noui, R. (2020). Higher education between massification and quality. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development, 14*(2), 93–103. https://doi.org/10.1108/heed-04-2020-0008

Oleson, A., & Hora, M. T. (2014). Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices. *Higher Education, 68*(1), 29–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9678-9

Olssen, M., & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*(3), 313–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500108718

Oolbekkink-Marchand, H. W., Hadar, L. L., Smith, K., Helleve, I., & Ulvik, M. (2017). Teachers' perceived professional space and their agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 62,* 37–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.11.005

Pantić, N. (2015). A model for study of teacher agency for social justice. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(6), 759–778. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044332

Pietarinen, J., Pyhältö, K., Soini, T., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2013). Reducing teacher burnout: A socio-contextual approach. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 35*, 62–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.05.003

Pollitt, A. (2012). Comparative judgement for assessment. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, *22*(2), 157–170. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-011-9189-x

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach.* Bloomsbury Publishing. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474219426

Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry, 42*(2), 191–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873x.2012.00588.x

Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2013). Comprehensive school teachers' professional agency in large-scale educational change. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*(3), 303–325. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9215-8

Ramsden, P., Prosser, M., Trigwell, K., & Martin, E. (2007). University teachers' experiences of academic leadership and their approaches to teaching. *Learning and Instruction, 17*(2), 140–155. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2007.01.004

Reinius, H., Kaukinen, I., Korhonen, T., Juuti, K., & Hakkarainen, K. (2022). Teachers as transformative agents in changing school culture. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 120*, 103888. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103888

Remmik, M., Karm, M., Haamer, A., & Lepp, L. (2011). Early-career academics' learning in academic communities. *International Journal for Academic Development, 16*(3), 187–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2011.596702

Riivari, E., Malin, V., Jääskelä, P., & Lukkari, T. (2018). University as a workplace: Searching for meaningful work. *Teaching in Higher Education, 25*(3), 286–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1563061

Romano, M. E. (2006). "Bumpy moments" in teaching: Reflections from practicing teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(8), 973–985. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.019

Ruan, X., Zheng, X., & Toom, A. (2020). From perceived discrepancies to intentional efforts: Understanding English department teachers' agency in classroom instruction in a changing curricular landscape. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 92*, 103074. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103074

Rushton, E. A. C., & Bird, A. (2024). Space as a lens for teacher agency: A case study of three beginning teachers in England, UK. *The Curriculum Journal, 35*(2), 254–270. https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.224

Sá, C., & Amaral, A. (2023). Revisiting market-oriented higher education and academic capitalism. In A. Amaral & A. Magalhães (Eds.), *Handbook on higher education management and governance* (pp. 340–358). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800888074.00039

Samuelowicz, K., & Bain, J. D. (2001). Revisiting academics' beliefs about teaching and learning. *Higher Education, 41*, 299–325. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004130031247

Sannino, A., & Engeström, Y. (2016). Relational agency, double stimulation and the object of activity: An intervention study in a primary school. In *Working relationally in and across practices: Cultural-historical approaches to collaboration* (pp. 58–77). Cambridge University Press.

Seidman, I. E. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide to researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction.* SAGE.

Simon, M., & Tierney, R. (2011). Use of vignettes in educational research on sensitive teaching functions as assessment. *24th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement*, 4–7 Jan 2011, Limassol, Cyprus. http://www.icsei.net/icsei2011/Full%20Papers/0153.pdf

Simpson, P., & Siguaw, J. (2000). Student evaluations of teaching: An exploratory study of the faculty response. *Journal of Marketing Education, 22*, 199–213. http://doi.org/10.1177/0273475300223004

Skilling, K., & Stylianides, G. J. (2020). Using vignettes in educational research: A framework for vignette construction. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 43*(5), 541–556. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727x.2019.1704243

Spooren, P., Brockx, B., & Mortelmans, D. (2013). On the validity of student evaluation of teaching: The state of the art. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(4), 598–642. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313496870

Stravakou, P., & Lozgka, E. (2018). Vignettes in Qualitative Educational Research: Investigating Greek school principals' values. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3358

Stroebe, W. (2020). Student evaluations of teaching encourage poor teaching and contribute to grade inflation: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 42*(4), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2020.1756817

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2017). Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 63*, 346–355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.010

Taylor, J. (2004). Toward a strategy for internationalisation: Lessons and practice from four universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 8*(2), 149–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260827

Tigelaar, D. E., Dolmans, D. H., Meijer, P. C., De Grave, W. S., & Van der Vleuten, C. P. (2006). Teachers' interactions and their collaborative reflection processes during peer meetings. *Advances in Health Sciences Education, 13*(3), 289–308. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-006-9040-4

Toom, A. (2019). Shaping teacher identities and agency for the profession: Contextual factors and surrounding communities. *Teachers and Teaching, 25*(8), 915–917. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1703619

Toom, A., Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2021). Professional agency for learning as a key for developing teachers' competencies? *Education Sciences, 11*(7), 324. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070324

Toom, A., Pyhältö, K., & Rust, F. O. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(6), 615–623. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044334

Ujir, H., Salleh, S. F., Marzuki, A. S. W., Hashim, H. F., & Alias, A. A. (2020). Teaching workload in 21st century higher education learning setting. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, 9*(1), 221. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i1.20419

Ursin, J., Vähäsantanen, K., McAlpine, L., & Hökkä, P. (2018). Emotionally loaded identity and agency in Finnish academic work. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44*(3), 311–325. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2018.1541971

Uttl, B., White, C. A., & Gonzalez, D. W. (2017). Meta-analysis of faculty's teaching effectiveness: Student evaluation of teaching ratings and student learning are not related. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 54*, 22–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2016.08.007

Vähäsantanen, K. (2014). Professional agency in the stream of change: Understanding educational change and teachers' professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 47*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.11.006

Vähäsantanen, K., Paloniemi, S., Räikkönen, E., & Hökkä, P. (2020). Professional agency in a university context: Academic freedom and fetters. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 89*, 103000. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.103000

Vähäsantanen, K., Räikkönen, E., Paloniemi, S., Hökkä, P., & Eteläpelto, A. (2019). A novel instrument to measure the multidimensional structure of professional agency. *Vocations and Learning, 12*(2), 267–295. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-018-9210-6

Vähäsantanen, K., Saarinen, J., & Eteläpelto, A. (2009). Between school and working life: Vocational teachers' agency in boundary-crossing settings. *International Journal of Educational Research, 48*(6), 395–404. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2010.04.003

Van Baalen, W. M., De Groot, T., & Noordegraaf-Eelens, L. (2021). Higher education, the arts, and transdisciplinarity: A systematic review of the literature. *Research in Education, 111*(1), 24–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/00345237211005799

Van Beveren, L., Roets, G., Buysse, A., & Rutten, K. (2018). We all reflect, but why? A systematic review of the purposes of reflection in higher education in social and behavioral sciences. *Educational Research Review, 24*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.01.002

Van der Rijst, R. (2024, September 13). *On the relevance and necessity of research into higher education* [Inaugural address]. Scholarly Publications. https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/4054961

Van Dijk, E. E., Geertsema, J., Van der Schaaf, M. F., Van Tartwijk, J., & Kluijtmans, M. (2022). Connecting academics' disciplinary knowledge to their professional development as university teachers: A conceptual analysis of teacher expertise and teacher knowledge. *Higher Education, 86*(4), 969–984. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00953-2

Van Dijk, E. E., Van Tartwijk, J., Van der Schaaf, M. F., & Kluijtmans, M. (2020). What makes an expert university teacher? A systematic review and synthesis of frameworks for teacher expertise in higher education. *Educational Research Review, 31*, 100365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100365

Van Kan, C. A., Ponte, P., & Verloop, N. (2010). How to conduct research on the inherent moral significance of teaching: A phenomenological elaboration of the standard repertory grid application. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(8), 1553–1562. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.007

Van Lankveld, T., Schoonenboom, J., Volman, M., Croiset, G., & Beishuizen, J. (2016). Developing a teacher identity in the university context: A systematic review of the literature. *Higher Education Research & Development, 36*(2), 325–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1208154

Van Leeuwen, J. L., Schaap, H., Geijsel, F. P., & Meijer, P. C. (2022). Early career teachers' experiences with innovative professional potential in secondary schools in the Netherlands. *Professional Development in Education, 50*(2), 403–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2022.2129738

Van Vijfeijken, M., Van Schilt-Mol, T., Van den Bergh, L., Scholte, R. H. J., & Denessen, E. (2024). An evaluation of a professional development program aimed at empowering teachers' agency for social justice. *Frontiers in Education, 9*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1244113

Van Winkel, M. A., Van der Rijst, R. M., Poell, R. F., & Van Driel, J. H. (2018). Identities of research-active academics in new universities: Towards a complete academic profession cross-cutting different worlds of practice. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(4), 539–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2017.1301407

Verhavert, S., Bouwer, R., Donche, V., & De Mæyer, S. (2019). A meta-analysis on the reliability of comparative judgement. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 26*(5), 541–562. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594x.2019.1602027

Verhavert, S., De Mæyer, S., Donche, V., & Coertjens, L. (2018). Scale separation reliability: What does it mean in the context of comparative judgment? *Applied Psychological Measurement, 42*(6), 428–445. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146621617748321

Vreekamp, M., Gulikers, J. T., Runhaar, P. R., & Den Brok, P. J. (2023). A systematic review to explore how characteristics of pedagogical development programmes in higher education are related to teacher development outcomes. *International Journal for Academic Development, 1*-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2023.2233471

VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO, & ZonMw. (2019). *Towards a new balance in recognising and rewarding academics* (Metamorfose Vertalingen, Trans.).
https://recognitionrewards.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/position-paper-room-for-everyones-talent.pdf

Wang, L., De Vetten, A., Admiraal, W., & Van der Rijst, R. (2024). Relationship between perceived learner control and student engagement in various study activities in a blended course in higher education. *Education and Information Technologies*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12910-w

Yang, H. (2021). Epistemic agency, a double-stimulation, and video-based learning: A formative intervention study in language teacher education. *System*, *96*, 102401. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102401

Yang, H. (2022). Developing language preservice teachers' epistemic agency in using technology in language teaching. In D. L. Banegas, E. Edwards, & L. S. Villacañas de Castro (Eds.), *Professional development through teacher research: Stories from language teacher educators*. Channel View. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788927727-007

Yang, H., & Clarke, M. (2018). Spaces of agency within contextual constraints: A case study of teacher's response to EFL reform in a Chinese university. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 38*(2), 187-201. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2018.1460252

Appendices

(Related to Chapter 3)

Appendix A. All codes and how often they are applied.

	Code	Applied
1	dealing with rules and requirements of university	7
2	difference in pre- knowledge	7
3	insufficient preparation of students	6
4	passive unmotivated students	5
5	dealing with conflicts with colleagues and management	4
6	no suitable teaching space or organizational preconditions	4
7	dealing with complaints and unexpected questions from students	4
8	dealing with workload	4
9	too little time for teaching preparation	3
10	technical problems	3
11	managing student expectations	3
12	administration	2
13	student hurt by joke	2
14	being thrown in at the deep end	2
15	dealing with controversial topics in college	2
16	dealing with individual (problems) student	2
17	not enough seats for students	2
18	too little time for educational innovation	2
19	much freedom per individual but little coherence between courses	2
20	implement changes in course	2
21	difference in teaching drive between colleagues	2
22	balancing workload and offer personal guidance	2
23	didactic choices	2
24	change of job position	1

Appendix B. Four different forms of one scenario.

	First- person	Third- person
Open-ended	TITLE: Unprepared students in lecture The third lecture of my course was about to begin. As usual, students had to read an article to prepare for the lecture. During the lecture, there came little response to my questions. Only the few students who always actively participate made any attempt to answer my questions. When I tried to involve others in the discussion, I didn't succeed. I asked who had read the article I had sent in advance, but it turned out that only a handful of students had prepared as instructed. I realized that most students had not prepared the lecture, so I knew I had to come up with a solution.	TITLE: Unprepared students in lecture The third lecture of Dr. Johnson's course was about to begin. As usual, students had to read an article to prepare for the lecture. During the lecture, there came little response to Dr. Johnson's questions. Only the few students who always actively participate made any attempt to answer Dr. Johnson's questions. When Dr. Johnson tried to involve others in the discussion, he didn't succeed. Dr. Johnson asked who had read the article he had sent in advance, but it turned out that only a handful of students had prepared as instructed. Dr. Johnson realized that most students had not prepared the lecture, so he knew he had to come up with a solution.
Completed	TITLE: Unprepared students in lecture The third lecture of my course was about to begin. As usual, students had to read an article to prepare for the lecture. During the lecture, there came little response to my questions. Only the few students who always actively participate made any attempt to answer my questions. When I tried to involve others in the discussion, I didn't succeed. I asked who had read the article I had sent in advance, but it turned out that only a handful of students had prepared as instructed. I realized that most students had not prepared the lecture and decided to use the situation as a learning opportunity by suggesting discussion groups to encourage future preparation and simplifying the content to re-engage the entire class.	TITLE: Unprepared students in lecture The third lecture of Dr. Johnson's course was about to begin. As usual, students had to read an article to prepare for the lecture. During the lecture, there came little response to Dr. Johnson's questions. Only the few students who always actively participate made any attempt to answer Dr. Johnson's questions. When Dr. Johnson tried to involve others in the discussion, he didn't succeed. Dr. Johnson asked who had read the article he had sent in advance, but it turned out that only a handful of students had prepared as instructed. Dr. Johnson realized that most students had not prepared the lecture and decided to use the situation as a learning opportunity by suggesting discussion groups to encourage future preparation and simplifying the content to re-engage the entire class.

Appendix C. The 23 final scenarios.

TITLE: Students' personal problems

I'm a lecturer at this university. During one of my courses, I noticed that one of my students had been struggling in class for some time. The student was not meeting the deadlines, seemed unmotivated, and hardly interacted with other students. I had a conversation with the student, and she told me that things were going badly at home and that was why she couldn't keep her attention in class. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Workload

As a lecturer, I experience constant pressure to teach, conduct research, publish articles, and attend conferences. It feels like a constant struggle to get everything done within the tight deadlines set by the university. I am aware that this pressure is a result of both the high standards set for university teachers and our own passion for the job. It feels like there are never enough hours in a day, and at times I feel overwhelmed. I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Coherence between courses

One of the things I appreciate most about teaching at the university is the freedom I have to develop my own courses and shape my teaching in the way I feel best. I take pride in developing courses that can inspire and challenge my students, and I enjoy creating a unique learning experience for them. At the same time, sometimes it seems my colleagues and I are all working on our own "island." It seems that this individual freedom comes at the cost of a lack of coherence and consistency across the curriculum. So I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Technical issues

Well in time, I arrived in class to get everything ready for my lecture. However, the computer was very slow in starting up and eventually crashed completely. While my students entered the class, I tried to restart the computer. My heart rate accelerated as I watched the clock tick away and realized how much time we were losing. I realized how dependent we are on technology nowadays! I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Student expectations

As a lecturer, I notice that students increasingly expect individual feedback and guidance. Students' expectations seem to have changed since my own student days, and this puts additional pressure on me as a lecturer. I appreciate that students value feedback and guidance. I understand that this is a crucial part of their learning process, and I do my best to meet their expectations. But one day, I felt completely overwhelmed by the large number of emails I received from students who asked for feedback or a one-on-one meeting. So I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Students differ in prior knowledge

I walked into the classroom, ready to start my subject's introductory lecture. It was the first lecture of the new academic year. First, I did a small recap of the basics, assuming these were still familiar to the students, and then introduced some new definitions and concepts. However, as I looked around the room, I noticed that many of my students struggled to keep up with the content. Some of them just stared blankly at their notes; others flipped desperately through their textbooks; only a few students were able to keep up. To verify whether students indeed struggled to keep up, I asked which of the students were familiar with the basic concepts. It turned out that there was a large variety with regard to their prior knowledge. For some, the new concepts were easy to understand, but for others, even the basic information was completely new. When I realized these differences in students' prior knowledge, I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Unprepared students in lecture

The third lecture of my course was about to begin. As usual, students had to read an article to prepare for the lecture. During the lecture, there was little response to my questions. Only the few students who always actively participated made any attempt to answer my questions. When I tried to involve others in the discussion, I didn't succeed. I asked who had read the article I had sent in advance, but it turned out that only a handful of students had prepared as instructed. I realized that most students had not prepared for the lecture, so I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Students' views on teaching quality of colleague

As a lecturer, I see it as my responsibility to put time and energy into the preparation of my classes and constantly look for ways to improve and innovate my teaching. However, I am told by students from other groups that their instructor is often poorly prepared, cannot provide appropriate answers to questions, and has already failed to meet the promised review deadline a couple of times. I hesitate to bring this up with my colleague: on the one hand, I do not think it is my responsibility, but on the other hand, my professionalism tells me that students have the right to a quality education. So I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Educational re-design

As a lecturer, I'm ambitious to keep improving my teaching and engage my students more, but constraints from the curriculum and my department hinder what I can achieve. There is no real incentive to improve teaching, nor are proper facilities provided. Still, I see it as part of my job to constantly look for ways to improve my teaching, so I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Implementing changes in course

I'm teaching a new course in which I want to experiment with some new teaching methods. However, the university requires me to send in the course description and grading procedures far in advance because of the long and tedious procedures for creating the study guide. Since I am currently busy teaching other courses, I feel hampered in implementing these innovations. On the one hand, I see it as my duty to further develop my teaching; on the other hand, I feel that my current teaching also deserves full attention. I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Students' unexpected questions

The students were in their seats, and I welcomed everyone. Before I actually began the lecture, a student raised her hand and asked a question unrelated to the lecture's topic. However, when I listened to the question, I found it an interesting question nonetheless, and, as I appreciated the idea that the student asked the question, I wanted to accommodate the student. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Balancing professional responsibilities

I value the personal mentoring of my students, as I believe personal attention contributes significantly to their success and well-being. I enjoy taking the time to have one-on-one meetings with my students and provide individual feedback, but I find that this becomes increasingly difficult as my student numbers increase. I find myself in a tight spot and have to make choices between my mentoring role and other duties, such as teaching and research. I struggle with this balance, so I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Lecture preparation

At the last moment, I had taken over a lecture from a colleague. When I started with the lecture, I soon realized that important slides were missing. I felt like I was thrown into the deep sea without a life jacket. I hadn't had enough time to prepare the lecture because my colleague hadn't saved all the slides. This frustrated me because I knew how important it was to provide students with a well-structured and organized lecture. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: View on teaching

It was the first time my colleague and I taught a particular current course. To prepare for the course, we divided the topics among ourselves. Beforehand, I was very excited to teach the course with my colleague. However, I discovered that we held completely different views on what good teaching entails. Conflicts arose over things like whether class attendance would be compulsory, the amount of feedback we would give, the method of grading, etc. These were long and exhausting debates; discussions ran high, and we struggled to understand each other. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Interaction in online teaching

I stared at my computer screen in frustration as I tried to lead an online discussion with my students. I found it hard to feel the same energy and connection as I did in the physical classroom. I missed the spontaneous conversations, body language, and in-person conversations with my students. I felt isolated and uncomfortable in this new environment. Still, I didn't want to give up because I felt I should be able to teach my classes properly even in this situation. So, I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Administrative tasks in thesis supervision

As a lecturer, I find the administrative hassle surrounding thesis supervision particularly time-consuming and frustrating. It feels like it never ends. I have to fill out all kinds of forms, keep track of deadlines, prepare reports, answer countless emails, and attend meetings. It seems more like an administrative job than supervising students. I would like to spend more time giving feedback and guidance to students instead of being stuck in a bureaucratic system. It is time for a more efficient way of working. I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Controversial topics in course

I taught a course that included some highly contested and controversial topics. I knew that these topics could lead to heated debates and even division among the students in class. Although I felt I was usually well-able to lead class discussions about sensitive issues, it seemed to become increasingly difficult to maintain an atmosphere of respect and understanding in class. What I feared did indeed happen: students felt attacked, and discussions got out of hand. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Being overwhelmed as a new lecturer

As a starting lecturer, I felt overwhelmed. The first period of teaching felt like a big pandemonium, full of challenges, like supervising students, preparing and delivering courses, and doing that in an inspiring way. Although I understood that it is normal to experience these challenges and I still had to build routines, it also felt like I was thrown into the deep end, and I had no idea where to start or how to manage all of these tasks. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Taking offense at joke

A student came up to me after the lecture. He said he felt offended by a joke another student had made during class. I felt uncomfortable because I was not aware of this situation, but I knew it was important to create a safe learning environment where students feel safe and free to express themselves. I took the student's concerns seriously because he was genuinely upset. I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Unmotivated students

I have been teaching at this university for several years now and have encountered many difficult students, but I had never experienced a class like this one before. Many students seemed uninterested in the material. Some students were sleeping; others were looking at their phones or talking to each other. When I asked who was interested in the subject, only a few hands went up. When I realized that the subject did not interest students at all, I knew I had to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Change of job position

I have accepted the position of educational director and find it difficult to be the manager of former colleagues. I feel I am in an awkward position and don't really know how to handle this situation. It occurs to me that my attitude toward my former co-workers has changed and that I am struggling to make choices that affect them. I want to find a way in my new role and find the right balance between collegiality and leadership. Still, I notice from the side of colleagues and myself that there is friction because of my new role. I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: Pedagogical choices

As a lecturer, I feel I need to continuously develop. This means that I have to use new pedagogical approaches. But I'm reluctant to change my pedagogical choices too drastically, since I am afraid that the students will not understand it and therefore will not perform as well. I still want to keep looking for ways to improve my teaching and challenge my students without disadvantaging them through poor teaching, but traditional ways of teaching feel more comfortable and may be safer. I know I have to come up with a solution.

TITLE: University rules

I'm an enthusiastic and dedicated lecturer, but I feel restricted by the rules and requirements of the university where I work. I have to follow a strict protocol for deviating from an exam date. Currently, a good student of mine is unable to take the exam due to personal circumstances. I want to accommodate her by offering another date, but because of all the rules of the university, she has to take the retake. Neither of us wants that, so I know I have to come up with a solution.

A

Samenvatting/ Summary

Hoofdstuk 1 - De algemene inleiding

Centraal in dit proefschrift staat het concept van teacher agency en de kritieke rol daarvan in universiteiten. Teacher agency wordt gedefinieerd als het vermogen van docenten om actief vorm te geven aan hun onderwijspraktijk en beslissingen te nemen binnen institutionele en maatschappelijke beperkingen. Het concept is echter complex en contextafhankelijk en wordt gevormd door factoren zoals *self-efficacy*, motivatie, overtuigingen en professionele identiteit, naast organisatiecultuur en maatschappelijke verwachtingen. In de algemene inleiding wordt benadrukt dat het begrijpen van teacher agency cruciaal is om docenten in staat te stellen betekenisvolle en stimulerende leerervaringen te creëren. De hoofdstukken in dit proefschrift zijn gericht op het onderzoeken van hoe docenten hun onderwijspraktijk vormgeven en hoe ze navigeren binnen het dynamische landschap van universiteiten, waarbij ze een evenwicht zoeken tussen de soms met elkaar concurrerende taken van onderwijs en onderzoek. In dit proefschrift worden de noodzaak om verder te gaan dan conventionele meetmethoden voor onderwijskwaliteit, en het belang voor een dieper begrip van de besluitvormingsprocessen van docenten benadrukt. De opzet van dit proefschrift omvat, naast de algemene inleiding en discussie, vier studies: een verkennend onderzoek naar de percepties van agency bij docenten, de ontwikkeling van een meetinstrument op maat voor universitaire contexten, een analyse van teacher agency in onderwijsscenario's en een verkenning van de onderliggende overtuigingen die de onderwijspraktijk van docenten vormgeven. Het doel met dit proefschrift is naast een dieper begrip van de theorie, bijdragen aan institutioneel beleid dat een cultuur van teacher agency bevordert. Het erkennen van de complexiteit van teacher agency levert waardevolle inzichten voor het ondersteunen van docenten in hun onderwijs, wat kan leiden tot verbeterde onderwijspraktijken en algehele kwaliteit van hun lesgeven.

Hoofdstuk 2 - De verkennende studie

In het tweede hoofdstuk is het onderzoek beschreven naar hoe docenten hun professional agency ervaren en hun rol als *change agents* binnen hun instellingen. Interviews met docenten van verschillende faculteiten identificeerden drie kernaspecten van professional agency: invloed op het werk, ontwikkeling van werkpraktijken en onderhandelen over professionele identiteit. Docenten ervoeren aanzienlijke autonomie bij het ontwerpen van cursussen, maar ondervonden uitdagingen bij het beïnvloeden van institutioneel beleid en curriculum. Ondanks hun enthousiasme voor onderwijsontwikkeling gaven leerkrachten aan een gebrek aan tijd en institutionele ondersteuning te ervaren om veranderingen door te voeren.

Met dit onderzoek werd een kloof aangetoond tussen persoonlijke aspiraties en structurele beperkingen door universiteitsbeleid, vooral op het gebied van professionele ontwikkeling. Uit het onderzoek bleek dat samenwerking tussen collega's als essentieel werd beschouwd, maar in de praktijk onderbenut bleef. Sommige docenten gaven aan zich geïsoleerd te voelen. Daarnaast bestond er een spanningsveld tussen onderzoeks- en onderwijsverantwoordelijkheden, waarbij onderzoek vaker prioriteit kreeg. Dit ontmoedigde onderwijsinnovatie.

Een implicatie uit dit hoofdstuk was dat universiteiten een omgeving moeten creëren waarin lesgeven wordt gewaardeerd en structurele mogelijkheden voor professionele ontwikkeling worden geboden. Aanbevelingen omvatten het stimuleren van interdisciplinaire samenwerking, het belonen van innovatief lesgeven en het bevorderen van open communicatie tussen docenten en het opleidingsbestuur. Er werden alternatieve dimensies voorgesteld om de contextspecificiteit te benadrukken: invloed op universitair onderwijs, ontwikkeling van universitair onderwijs en onderhandeling over docentidentiteit.

Met het onderzoek werd het belang aangetoond van institutionele erkenning van de bijdragen van docenten aan onderwijs, om hen in staat te stellen een grotere rol te spelen in onderwijsveranderingen en zo de kwaliteit van universitair onderwijs te blijven verbeteren.

Hoofdstuk 3 - De methodologische studie

In het derde hoofdstuk werd de ontwikkeling van context-specifieke onderwijsscenario's beschreven. Deze scenario's werden zo ontwikkeld dat ze gericht zijn op het meten en begrijpen van teacher agency binnen universiteiten. De studie identificeerde de belangrijkste uitdagingen waarmee docenten worden geconfronteerd, zoals betrokkenheid van studenten, flexibiliteit van het curriculum en omgaan met administratieve verantwoordelijkheden. In de eerste fase werden door middel van interviews met docenten realistische onderwijsdilemma's (*bumpy moments*) vastgesteld, die vervolgens werden gebruikt om scenario's te creëren die authentieke universitaire onderwijservaringen weerspiegelden. Daarna werd een validatieproces uitgevoerd met panels van deskundigen om eerst de schrijfvorm van de scenario's vast te stellen, en vervolgens met een tweede panel de potentie te beoordelen om teacher agency uit te lokken. Tot slot werden pilotinterviews gehouden om de bruikbaarheid van de scenario's te testen. De reeks scenario's dient als een dynamisch instrument om teacher agency te ontlokken, docenten te helpen nadenken over hun onderwijspraktijk en alternatieve strategieën te verkennen om met uitdagingen om te gaan. Door een kader te bieden waarmee de contextafhankelijke aard van teacher agency onderzocht kan worden, draagt dit hoofdstuk bij aan het empirisch onderzoek naar teacher agency vanuit een ecologisch perspectief.

Hoofdstuk 4 - De typologie van agentic actions studie

Uit het vierde hoofdstuk bleek dat docenten verschillende acties ondernamen bij uitdagende onderwijsscenario's, zoals beschreven in Hoofdstuk 3. Op basis van de op scenario's gebaseerde interviews, konden deze acties worden gecategoriseerd in thema's als curriculumaanpassing, studentenbetrokkenheid en pedagogisch-didactische innovatie. Docenten toonden uiteenlopende vormen van "agentic actions," variërend van kleine methodologische aanpassingen tot grote herontwerpen van cursussen.

In dit onderzoek werd een typologie van agentic actions ontwikkeld op basis van het ecologische model van teacher agency, met drie typen acties: Leidend, Aanpassend en Ondersteunend. Deze typen acties weerspiegelden verschillende manieren van besluitvorming en aanpassing bij het omgaan met onderwijsuitdagingen. Docenten die regelmatig hun onderwijs evalueerden, leken vaker betekenisvolle veranderingen door te willen voeren.

Belangrijke barrières voor *agency* waren werkdruk, een gebrek aan institutionele stimulansen en weerstand van collega's. In het hoofdstuk wordt benadrukt dat een omgeving die experimenteren en samenwerken stimuleert, docenten zou kunnen helpen meer eigenaarschap te nemen over hun onderwijs. Aanbevelingen omvatten het bevorderen van professionele leergemeenschappen, mentorprogramma's en institutionele erkenning van innovatieve onderwijsinspanningen. Het hoofdstuk besluit met dat een meer holistische benadering van het ondersteunen van teacher agency bij docenten nodig is om een cultuur van voortdurende onderwijsontwikkeling aan universiteiten te cultiveren.

Hoofdstuk 5 - De onderliggende overtuigingen van agentic orientations studie

In dit hoofdstuk werden de onderliggende overtuigingen van teacher agency onderzocht in het vormgeven van en omgaan met uitdagende onderwijssituaties. Het onderzoek toonde aan dat beslissingen van docenten worden beïnvloed door persoonlijke waarden, professionele aspiraties en institutionele verwachtingen. Sommige docenten richten zich op studentgerichte benaderingen en pedagogisch-didactische innovatie, terwijl anderen onderzoeksverplichtingen of carrièreperspectieven prioriteren.

In het onderzoek in dit hoofdstuk werden overtuigingen geïdentificeerd zoals passie voor het vak, het bevorderen van studentensucces en institutionele druk rond prestatie-evaluatie en financiering. Met de typologie van agentic actions (uit Hoofdstuk 4) werd onthuld dat docenten meerdere typen acties ondernemen afhankelijk van de context, wat wijst op de noodzaak van een genuanceerd begrip

van hun handelen. In het onderzoek werden drie "agentic orientations" onderscheiden: Accommoderen & Ondersteunen; Leidinggeven, Accommoderen & Ondersteunen; en Leidinggeven. Deze drie groepen weerspiegelen verschillende manieren waarop docenten reageerden op uitdagingen, elk met gedeelde overtuigingen. Inclusiviteit en Gelijkwaardigheid kenmerken de eerste groep, Samenwerking en Verantwoordelijkheid de tweede, en Verandering en Innovatie de derde.

In dit hoofdstuk werd de complexe wisselwerking benadrukt tussen overtuigingen en agentic orientations bij het navigeren van onderwijssituaties. Een implicatie van dit onderzoek was het belang van professionele ontwikkelingsprogramma's die rekening houden met de overtuigingen van docenten en maatwerkondersteuning bieden. Door deze overtuigingen te erkennen en ondersteuning op maat te bieden, kunnen docenten hun onderwijspraktijk beter afstemmen op hun doelen. Reflectieve praktijk, peer mentoring en interdisciplinaire samenwerking werden hierbij als effectieve strategieën aanbevolen.

Daarnaast benadrukte het onderzoek het belang van een institutionele cultuur die diverse onderwijsbenaderingen waardeert en ondersteunt. Een dergelijke cultuur stelt docenten in staat om teacher agency uit te oefenen op manieren die hun professionele voldoening vergroten en de kwaliteit van het onderwijs verbeteren.

Hoofdstuk 6 – De algemene discussie en implicaties

In het laatste hoofdstuk zijn de bevindingen van het proefschrift samengevat en zijn implicaties voor universitair onderwijs en beleid beschreven. In deze algemene discussie wordt de noodzaak benadrukt voor instellingen om teacher agency actief te ondersteunen door middel van beleid dat lesgeven en onderwijsontwikkeling erkent en beloont naast onderzoeksprestaties. Stimuleren van teacher agency vereist een veelzijdige aanpak, waaronder mogelijkheden voor professionele ontwikkeling, ondersteunend leiderschap en samenwerkende onderwijsculturen. In dit hoofdstuk wordt ook ingegaan op de beperkingen van de huidige

evaluatiemethoden voor docenten, die vaak niet de complexiteit van de bijdragen van docenten aan het onderwijs weergeven. In dit proefschrift wordt beargumenteerd dat het integreren van de principes van teacher agency in professionele ontwikkelingsprogramma's kan leiden tot meer betrokken docenten die beter toegerust zijn om de uitdagingen van het moderne universitaire landschap aan te gaan. Aanbevelingen zijn onder andere het bieden van gestructureerde mogelijkheden voor docenten om na te denken over hun onderwijspraktijk, het stimuleren van interdisciplinaire samenwerking en ervoor zorgen dat onderwijsinnovaties worden erkend en beloond op institutioneel niveau. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met het benadrukken van het belang om teacher agency centraal te stellen in de manier waarop docenten worden erkend. Het gebruik van teacher agency als raamwerk voor de evaluatie van docenten biedt een authentieke, holistische en bruikbare maatstaf voor de kwaliteit van docenten. Door teacher agency te ondersteunen en prioriteit te geven, kunnen universiteiten docenten beter erkennen en waarderen voor alle dimensies van hun rol als docent, en de evaluaties afstemmen op de kerndoelen en -waarden van de universiteit.

Chapter 1 – The general introduction

Central to this dissertation is the concept of teacher agency and its critical role in research-intensive universities. Teacher agency is defined as the capacity of lecturers to actively shape their teaching practices and make decisions within institutional and societal constraints. However, the concept is complex and context-dependent, shaped by factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, beliefs, and professional identity, alongside organizational culture and societal expectations. The General Introduction highlighted that understanding teacher agency is crucial for empowering lecturers to create meaningful and equitable learning experiences. The chapters presented in this dissertation aimed to explore how university lecturers shaped and navigated their teaching practices within the dynamic landscape of academia, balancing the competing demands of teaching and research. This dissertation emphasized the need to go beyond conventional metrics of teaching quality, advocating for a deeper understanding of lecturers' decision-making processes. The outline of this dissertation included four studies: an exploratory investigation of lecturers' perceptions of agency, the development of a measurement tool tailored to university contexts, an analysis of agentic actions in teaching scenarios, and an exploration of the underlying beliefs shaping lecturers' teaching practices. Ultimately, the dissertation sought to contribute to institutional policies fostering a teacher agency culture. Recognizing the complexities of teacher agency provided valuable insights for supporting lecturers in their roles as educators, leading to improved teaching practices and overall quality of their teaching.

Chapter 2 – The exploratory study

This chapter focused on how university lecturers perceived their professional agency and their potential to act as change agents within their institutions. Through interviews with lecturers from various departments, the study identified three key aspects of professional agency: influencing at work, developing work

practices, and negotiating professional identity. Lecturers reported experiencing significant autonomy in designing courses but encountered challenges in influencing broader institutional policies and curriculum decisions. While lecturers expressed enthusiasm for educational development, they often lacked the time and institutional support to pursue meaningful changes.

The study revealed a disconnect between lecturers' personal aspirations for teaching and the structural limitations imposed by university policies, particularly in terms of professional development. Collaboration with colleagues was seen as an essential yet underutilized tool for improving teaching practices, with many lecturers feeling isolated in their efforts. Another key finding was the tension between research and teaching responsibilities, where research was often prioritized over teaching in career progression, leading to a lack of motivation for pedagogical innovation.

The chapter argued that for lecturers to exercise teacher agency, universities need to create spaces that value teaching and provide structured opportunities for professional development. Further recommendations included encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, offering incentives for innovative teaching, and fostering open communication between faculty and administration. Theoretically, the study emphasized the need for a context-dependent understanding of professional teacher agency. The results, therefore, proposed alternative dimensions highlighting the context-specificity: influencing university teaching, developing university teaching, and negotiating teacher identity.

Ultimately, this chapter stressed the importance of institutional recognition of lecturers' contributions to teaching to empower them to take on a greater role in educational change and thus continue to improve the quality of their teaching.

Chapter 3 – The methodological study

This third chapter outlined the development of context-specific teaching scenarios aimed at measuring and understanding teacher agency in universities. The study identified key challenges faced by lecturers, such as student engagement,

curriculum flexibility, and navigating administrative responsibilities. In the first phase, interviews with lecturers were conducted to identify realistic teaching dilemmas (*bumpy moments*), which were then used to create scenarios that reflected authentic university teaching experiences. Subsequently, a validation process was carried out with panels of experts to first establish the writing style of the scenarios and then with a second panel to assess the potential to elicit teacher agency. Finally, pilot interviews were conducted to test the usability of the scenarios. The set of scenarios served as a dynamic tool for eliciting teacher agency, helping lecturers reflect on their teaching practices and explore alternative strategies for navigating teaching challenges.

The chapter concluded by emphasizing the potential of scenario-based approaches in fostering reflective teaching practices and encouraging universities to integrate such tools into professional development programs. By providing a framework to examine the context-dependent nature of teacher agency, the study contributed to the empirical investigation of teacher agency from an ecological perspective.

Chapter 4 – The typology of actions study

This chapter examined the specific agentic actions taken by lecturers when confronted with the challenging teaching scenarios developed in Chapter 3. Using scenario-based interviews, the study categorized actions into key themes such as curriculum adaptation, student engagement, and pedagogical innovation. Lecturers demonstrated varying manifestations of agency, from minor adjustments to their teaching methods to substantial course redesigns.

Based on the participants' responses to the scenarios, a typology of agentic actions was developed, grounded in the ecological model of teacher agency. The study identified three distinct categories of agentic actions: Leading, Accommodating, and Supporting. These categories reflected diverse approaches to decision-making and adaptation when navigating challenging teaching scenarios.

An important implication of this study was the role of reflective practice in enhancing teacher agency, as lecturers who regularly assessed their teaching effectiveness were more likely to implement meaningful changes. Challenges such as workload pressures, lack of institutional incentives, and resistance to change from colleagues were highlighted as significant barriers to agency. The chapter suggested that fostering an environment that encouraged experimentation, and collaboration could help lecturers take greater ownership over their teaching.

Recommendations included professional learning communities, mentorship programs, and institutional recognition of innovative teaching efforts. The chapter concluded that a more holistic approach to supporting lecturers' teacher agency was necessary to cultivate a culture of ongoing teaching development in universities.

Chapter 5 – The underlying beliefs of agentic orientations study

This chapter explored the underlying beliefs and motivations that shaped lecturers' teaching practices through the exercise of teacher agency. The study found that lecturers' decisions were influenced by a complex interplay of personal values, professional aspirations, and institutional expectations. While some lecturers were deeply committed to student-centered approaches and pedagogical innovation, others prioritized research commitments or career advancement considerations.

In this chapter, a range of beliefs was identified, including a passion for subject matter, a desire to foster student success, and institutional pressures related to performance evaluation and funding. Applying the typology of agentic actions (from Chapter 4) uncovered the underlying beliefs that shaped lecturers' actions. The findings revealed that lecturers often employed multiple actions depending on the specific context, suggesting the need for a more nuanced understanding of agentic actions. As a result, the study identified three distinct groups of shared agentic orientations: Accommodating & Supporting, Leading, Accommodating

& Supporting, and Leading. These groups illustrated how lecturers responded to challenges in different ways.

Further analysis revealed that each group embodied shared beliefs about teaching and learning, namely, Inclusivity and Equity for the first group, Responsibility and Collaboration for the second, and Change and Innovation for the third. This study underscored the complex interplay between university lecturers' beliefs and their agentic orientations when navigating challenging teaching situations.

This chapter advocated for professional development programs that acknowledged these diverse beliefs and provided tailored support to help lecturers align their teaching practices with their professional goals. Strategies such as reflective practice, peer mentoring, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration were recommended to enhance lecturers' agency. Ultimately, the study emphasized the importance of fostering an institutional culture that valued and supported diverse teaching approaches, enabling lecturers to exercise agency in ways that enhanced both their professional fulfillment and the quality of teaching.

Chapter 6 – The general discussion and implications

The final chapter synthesized the findings of the dissertation and discussed their implications for university teaching and policy. It highlighted the need for institutions to actively support teacher agency through policies that recognized and rewarded teaching excellence alongside research achievements. The chapter emphasized that fostering teacher agency required a multi-faceted approach, including professional development opportunities, supportive leadership, and collaborative teaching cultures.

It also addressed the shortcomings of the methods currently used to evaluate lecturers, which often failed to capture the complexity of lecturers' contributions to teaching. In this dissertation, it is suggested that integrating teacher agency principles into professional development programs could lead to more engaged

lecturers who were better equipped to meet the challenges of the modern university landscape.

Recommendations included offering structured opportunities for lecturers to reflect on their teaching practices, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and ensuring that teaching innovations were recognized and rewarded at the institutional level. The chapter concluded by emphasizing the importance of placing teacher agency at the center of how lecturers need to be acknowledged. Using teacher agency as a framework for evaluating lecturers provides an authentic, holistic, and actionable measure of teacher quality. By supporting and prioritizing teacher agency, universities could better recognize and reward lecturers across all dimensions of their teaching roles, aligning evaluations with the core goals and values of the university.

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Max Kusters was born on 31 March 1992 in Waalre, the Netherlands. He completed his secondary education at the Lorentz Casimir Lyceum in Eindhoven. In 2009, he began a first-degree teacher training program at Fontys University of Applied Sciences in physical education, laying the foundation for a career in teaching and learning.

After graduating, Max spent several years teaching before deciding to deepen his understanding of education through academic study. He enrolled in the Educational Sciences program at the University of Amsterdam and graduated in 2019.

During his Master's, Max undertook a research internship at the University of Helsinki within the Department of Educational Sciences. His research focused on student motivation in vocational education. This internship marked a turning point, sparking a lasting passion for educational research.

In 2020, Max began his PhD trajectory at ICLON, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching. In addition to his doctoral research, he took on several teaching and supervisory responsibilities. He was involved in delivering and guiding educational and graduation projects within the teacher education program, and he served as a lecturer in the Living Education Lab minor. Beyond ICLON, Max actively contributed to the broader educational research community. He was involved with the National Educational Research Association (VOR) as former chair of the PhD-network and present board member of the Higher Education division. He also served on the Educational Committee of the Interuniversity Centre for Educational Research (ICO). Currently, Max continues his work at ICLON as a postdoctoral researcher in Higher Education.

List of publications

List of publications

Articles in peer-reviewed journals

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Admiraal, W., & Van der Rijst, R. (2024). Developing scenarios for exploring teacher agency in universities: A multimethod study. *Frontline Learning Research, 12*(2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v12i2.1419

Kusters, M., Sand, M., & Rietdijk, D. (2024). Identiteit en agency van docenten in universiteiten: Sleutels tot professionele ontwikkeling en onderwijsontwikkeling [Identity and agency of teachers in universities: Keys to professional development and educational development]. *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs, 42*. https://doi.org/10.59532/tvho.v42i19449

Kusters, M., Van der Rijst, R., De Vetten, A., & Admiraal, W. (2023). University lecturers as change agents: How do they perceive their professional agency? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 127,* 104097. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104097

Presentations at educational conferences

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2021, July). *Teacher agency in universities*. Paper presented as part of a symposium at the Onderwijs Research Dagen (ORD), Online Conference.

Kusters, M. (2021, November). *They understand what it takes: Teacher agency in universities*. Paper presented at the International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI), Online Conference. https://library.iated.org/view/KUSTERS2021YUN

Kusters, M, Van der Rijst, R., De Vetten, A., & Admiraal, W. (2022, July). *Teacher agency among lecturers: Escape from go with the flow.* Poster presented at the Onderwijs Research Dagen (ORD), Hasselt, Belgium.

Kusters, M., Van der Rijst, R., De Vetten, A., & Admiraal, W. (2022, August). *Lecturers' perceptions of their professional agency*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Yerevan, Armenia.

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2023, March). *Understand what it takes: Teacher agency manifestations in universities*. Paper presented as part of a symposium at the Nordic Educational Research Association (NERA) Conference, Oslo, Norway.

Kusters, M, De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2023, July). *Development of real-life scenarios for manifestation of teacher agency in university.* Round table presentation at the Onderwijs Research Dagen (ORD), Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2024, July). *Understanding what it takes: Teacher Agency in universities.* Paper presented as part of a symposium at the Onderwijs Research Dagen (ORD), Tilburg, the Netherlands.

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2024, August). *Teacher agency in universities: Exploring manifestations within an ecological approach.* Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Nicosia, Cyprus.

Kusters, M., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., Rushton, E.A.C., & Admiraal, W. (2025, April). *Teacher agency in universities: Lecturers' potential in establishing and fostering sustainable partnerships.* Paper presented as part of a symposium at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, United States.

Kusters, M., Rushton, E.A.C., De Vetten, A., Van der Rijst, R., & Admiraal, W. (2025, June). *Investigating complex issues in education: Understanding teacher agency in universities.* Paper presented as part of a symposium at the Onderwijs Research Dagen (ORD), Leuven, Belgium.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments

Supervisors and colleagues

The support and insights of my supervisors were invaluable to this project. Wilfried, I really appreciated your quick and thorough feedback and your approachability. I always looked forward (and still do) to meetings with you, which are rich in content and humor. Roeland, beyond your valuable academic input, we've shared memorable experiences – from the Recognition & Rewards Festival to conferences. You gave me plenty of space to develop my own *agency,* explore ideas, and guide me in shaping my career path. Arjen, although you officially joined the team after the first year, you were already involved before then, and I always appreciated our conversations and your commitment to the project. I still value our ongoing conversations and collaborations on new projects today.

To all my colleagues at ICLON: thank you for the warm welcome and for all the fun events. A special thanks to everyone in the research group; sharing ideas, receiving feedback, and learning about your diverse research areas has been inspiring. Inge and Ben, sorry for the thousand questions, and thank you for answering them all! Mario, organizing the *Peer Pub. Review* with you was not only a lot of fun but also insightful. Your sharp perspectives really helped refine my own thinking for this dissertation. It's just a shame though, that I never managed to beat you at table football thus far!

I'm very grateful to LUF for making my research visit to the University of Stirling possible. Mark Priestley and Lizzie Rushton, thank you for warmly welcoming me into your research group. That final push was filled with fresh energy, and Lizzie, I truly appreciate our ongoing collaboration.

To Helma and Nicolette, working with you on the Agency Special Issue and the accompanying conversations about our insights, ideas, and perspectives have enriched my research.

A big thank you to my VOR-division colleagues. To VPO (Boukje, Esther, Imke, Inge, Iris, Julia, Kevin, Maria, Saskia, Simone): your energy during our meetings and events was uplifting. I hope our paths cross many more times in the future. And to the Higher Education division (Jannet, Lisette, Maaike, Migchiel, Perry, Petrie, Sanne, Tim): I look forward to continuing conversations and activities with you.

ICO has also played an important role for me. Thank you to all the teachers and colleagues for the engaging discussions and collaborations. The Spring School 2023, in particular, will always stand out in my memory. A special thanks to Caroline, who is inseparably connected to those positive experiences.

To my paranymphs Kevin and Simone, thanks for being such nice colleagues, and thank you in advance for supporting me during the defense.

While I haven't been able to mention everyone personally, I'm thankful to the people I've met over the years and with whom I've had meaningful and inspiring conversations about education, research, PhD experiences, and career prospects.

Vrienden en familie

Aan mijn vrienden: bedankt voor jullie begrip de afgelopen jaren, vragen over de status "van die scriptie" en voor de gezellige momenten buiten mijn PhD. Met in het bijzonder Floris, jij herinnerde me er – vrij expliciet – met enige regelmaat aan dat er meer is in het leven dan *teacher agency*, wat soms nodig was om mij achter mijn laptop vandaan te sleuren. Dank daarvoor. Bovendien stond je de ochtend na mijn eerste publicatie op de stoep met felicitaties.

Nicole, Wim en Roy, bedankt voor jullie betrokkenheid en complimenten.

Kim en Joost, jullie trotse en lieve woorden hebben me enorm goed gedaan. Ook alle gezellige weekendjes weg met de familie waren een welkome afleiding. Lieve

Jet en Kees, hoewel jullie nog maar weinig van *teacher agency* begrijpen, zijn jullie op een heel ander vlak het allerbeste klankbord dat ik me kan wensen.

Pap en mam, dank jullie wel voor jullie onvoorwaardelijke steun. Mama, je luisterde met oprechte belangstelling, ook als ik zelf niet eens precies begreep waar ik mee bezig was. Je stelde vragen, dacht mee, en gaf me telkens het gevoel dat wat ik deed ertoe deed. Papa, altijd mijn *critical friend*: stukken opvragen, meelezen, meedenken, en zowel gevraagd als ongevraagd advies was altijd gewenst advies. Zeer waardevol. En jouw bezoek tijdens mijn bezoek aan Stirling was bijzonder en onvergetelijk.

En tot slot Amy, je liefdevolle steun, aanmoediging, betrokkenheid, en vooral geduld de afgelopen jaren zijn van onschatbare waarde geweest. Je verrijkt mijn leven op alle denkbare manieren. Ik kijk uit naar onze Canada-reis, en naar alles wat daarna nog komt, naar alle kleine en grote momenten die we nog samen gaan beleven.

ICLON PhD Dissertation Series

ICLON PhD Dissertation Series

Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching
ICLON PhD Dissertation Series

Hoeflaak, A. (1994). *Decoderen en interpreteren: een onderzoek naar het gebruik van strategieën bij het beluisteren van Franse nieuwsteksten.*

Verhoeven, P. (1997). *Tekstbegrip in het onderwijs klassieke talen.*

Meijer, P.C. (1999). *Teachers' practical knowledge: Teaching reading comprehension in secondary education.*

Zanting, A. (2001). *Mining the mentor's mind: The elicitation of mentor teachers' practical knowledge by prospective teachers.*

Uhlenbeck, A.M. (2002). *The development of an assessment procedure for beginning teachers of English as a foreign language.*

Oolbekkink-Marchand, H.W. (2006). *Teachers' perspectives on self-regulated learning: An exploratory study in secondary and university education.*

Henze-Rietveld, F.A. (2006). *Science teachers' knowledge development in the context of educational innovation.*

Mansvelder-Longayroux, D.D. (2006). *The learning portfolio as a tool for stimulating reflection by student teachers.*

Meirink, J.A. (2007). *Individual teacher learning in a context of collaboration in teams.*

Nijveldt, M.J. (2008). *Validity in teacher assessment: An exploration of the judgement processes of assessors.*

Bakker, M.E.J. (2008). *Design and evaluation of video portfolios: Reliability, generalizability, and validity of an authentic performance assessment for teachers.*

Oonk, W. (2009). *Theory-enriched practical knowledge in mathematics teacher education.*

Visser-Wijnveen, G.J. (2009). *The research-teaching nexus in the humanities: Variations among academics.*

Van der Rijst, R.M. (2009). *The research-teaching nexus in the sciences: Scientific research dispositions and teaching practice.*

Platteel, T.L. (2010). *Knowledge development of secondary school L1 teachers on concept-context rich education in an action-research setting.*

Kessels, C.C. (2010). *The influence of induction programs on beginning teachers' well-being and professional development.*

Min-Leliveld, M.J. (2011). *Supporting medical teachers' learning: Redesigning a program using characteristics of effective instructional development.*

Dobber, M. (2011). *Collaboration in groups during teacher education.*

Wongsopawiro, D. (2012). *Examining science teachers pedagogical content knowledge in the context of a professional development program.*

Belo, N.A.H. (2013). *Engaging students in the study of physics: An investigation of physics teachers' belief systems about teaching and learning physics.*

De Jong, R.J. (2013). *Student teachers' practical knowledge, discipline strategies, and the teacher-class relationship.*

Verberg, C.P.M. (2013). *The characteristics of a negotiated assessment procedure to promote teacher learning.*

Van Kan, C.A. (2013). *Teachers' interpretations of their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest: A perspective from continental European pedagogy.*

Dam, M. (2014). *Making educational reforms practical for teachers: Using a modular, success-oriented approach to make a context-based educational reform practical for implementation in Dutch biology education.*

Hu, Y. (2014). *The role of research in university teaching: A comparison of Chinese and Dutch teachers.*

Vink, C.C. (2014). *Mapping for meaning: Using concept maps to integrate clinical and basic sciences in medical education.*

De Hei, M.S.A. (2016). *Collaborative learning in higher education: design, implementation and evaluation of group learning activities.*

Louws, M.L. (2016). *Professional learning: what teachers want to learn.*

Moses, I. (2017). *Student-teachers' commitment to teaching.*

Veldman, I.M.J. (2017). *Stay or leave? Veteran teachers' relationships with students and job satisfaction.*

Chen, D. (2017). *Intercultural identities of English language teachers: An exploration in China and the Netherlands.*

Vereijken, M.W.C. (2018). *Student engagement in research in medical education.*

Stollman, S.H.M. (2018). *Differentiated instruction in practice: A teacher perspective.*

Day, I.N.Z. (2018). *Intermediate assessment in higher education.*

Huisman, B.A. (2018). *Peer feedback on academic writing.*

Tran, T.T.Q. (2018). *Cultural differences in Vietnam: Differences in work-related values between Western and Vietnamese culture and cultural awareness at higher education.*

Van Ginkel, G.V.M. (2018). *Making mentoring match: Mentor teachers' practical knowledge of adaptive mentoring.*

Wieringa, N. (2019). *Teacher knowledge and lesson design: Understanding and supporting biology teachers' decision-making while designing context-based lessons.*

Vossen, T.E. (2019). *Research and design in STEM education: What do students and teachers think about the connection?*

Van Kampen, E. (2019). *What's CLIL about bilingual education? A window on Content and Language Integrated Learning pedagogies.*

Den Ouden, J.A.J. (2020). *Zachtjes schudden aan de boom: Een onderzoek naar rationales en kernpraktijken van eerstegraads docenten Godsdienst/ Levensbeschouwing gericht op de levensbeschouwelijke identiteitsontwikkeling van hun leerlingen.*

Vogelzang, J. (2020). *Scrum in secondary chemistry education: A methodology to support teachers and to scaffold students.*

Kop. P.M.G.M. (2020). *Graphing formulas by hand to promote symbol sense: Becoming friends with algebraic formulas.*

Lamers-Reeuwijk, A.M. (2020). *Teaching and professional development in transnational education in Oman.*

De Vrind, E. (2020). *The SpeakTeach method: Towards self-regulated learning of speaking skills in foreign languages in secondary schools: an adaptive and practical approach.*

De Jong, L.A.H. (2021). *Teacher professional learning and collaboration in secondary schools.*

Zhang, X. (2021). *Teachers' teaching and learning motivation in China.*

Wang, J. (2021). *Technology integration in education: Policy plans, teacher practices, and student outcomes.*

Guo, P. (2021). *Online project-based higher education: Student collaboration and outcomes.*

Jin, X. (2021). *Peer feedback in teacher professional development.*

Keijzer-Groot, R. (2021). *Vocational identity of at-risk youth: Tailoring to support career chances.*

Rumiantsev, T. (2022). *Collaborative learning in conservatoire education: catalyst for innovation.*

Galikyan, I. (2022). *Learner–learner interaction in digital learning environments: What and how are we measuring?*

De Boer, E. (2022). *Towards An Ecological Approach to Teacher Professional Development: How preservice biology teachers direct their learning routes in authentic classroom settings.*

Kroneman, M. (2022). *Peer education as an opportunity for practicing respect for sexual and gender diversity.*

Le, T.T.T. (2022). *Towards a democratic school: Experience and viewpoints of stakeholders in Vietnamese secondary schools.*

Zhou, N. (2023). *Professional learning of vocational teachers in the context of work placement.*

Smit, B.H.J. (2023). *Dimensions of student participation: Participatory action research in a teacher education context.*

Baas, M.A.A. (2023). *Open to all, not known to all: Sustaining practices with open educational resources in higher education.*

Den Otter, M.-J. (2023). *Bridging the Gap between Macro and Micro: Enhancing Students' Chemical Reasoning. How to use demonstration experiments effectively for the teaching and learning of structure-property reasoning.*

Theeuwes-De Bock, B.C. (2024). *Culturally responsive teaching in Dutch multicultural secondary schools.*

Lai, Y. (2024). *Self-Directed Language Learning Using Mobile Technology in Higher Education.*

Kusters, M.C.J. (2025). *Understanding teacher agency in universities: Why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices.*