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

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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.