

Article

The Phenomenon of Lecturer Competences as a Prerequisite for the Advancement of Sustainable Development Ideas in the Context of Student-Centred Studies

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Abstract: Research and higher education regulations have been shaping attitudes not only towards the higher education lecturer as a professional in the field who is able to use educational tools but also towards the interfaces between lecturers and students. In this lecturer–student interaction, the students’ own perception of the qualities of the lecturer’s personality and/or possessed competences that are acceptable to them and that motivate them to participate in the learning process should be emphasised as an important aspect of success. Thus, the article raises the following problem questions: (1) What competences should a lecturer have from the students’ point of view to achieve student-centred studies? (2) What is the relationship between the competences of the lecturer and the implementation of sustainable development ideas in the organisation of student-centred studies? This article is based on a 2019 survey conducted among Lithuanian university and college students, employing a questionnaire survey with a survey instrument that included open-ended questions. The survey was conducted with a sample of 390 participants. In addressing the issue at hand, it becomes evident that, from the students’ perspective, the personality of the lecturer possesses a multidimensional character. They not only value the lecturer’s expertise in the subject matter taught (subject competence) but also place a stronger emphasis on two other aspects. First, they value the lecturer’s ability to motivate and engage students in the learning process (educational competence), which includes an essential component: communication competence. Second, the lecturer’s personality acquires meaning through fundamental human values.

Keywords: higher education; lecturer; communication competence; educational competence; lecturer’s personality; subject competence



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1. Introduction and Background

Over the last 20 years, the external structure of higher education as an organisation has been undergoing significant changes and/or transformations, as well as internal changes that are taking place or are about to take place, as a result of globalisation, international commitments, and the needs of the higher education actors themselves. The increased competitiveness of higher education in Europe and the rest of the world forces universities to take a serious and responsible approach not only to the research activities of their faculty members but also to their pedagogical activities, which are integrally linked to their knowledge of the didactics of higher education [1,2]. There is a clear call for high-quality, innovative pedagogy in higher education institutions, reinforced by student-centred studies promoted by higher education policies. Student-centred studies are currently attracting increasing research attention internationally, driven both by the growing concern of lecturers for appropriate and effective teaching and learning methods and by students’ need to study in innovative ways and maintain parity relationships with their lecturers. However, lecturers do not have enough experience and competences in implementing student-centred studies and need more training or seminars on these topics [3,4]. Moreover, it is observed

that the competences required for a lecturer are not constant and should be continuously monitored and improved according to the need [5]. It is strongly assumed that professionals are able to maintain their competences through continuous professional learning and development. There is a growing understanding that competence and erudition depend on context. Professionals develop their skills and competences in different ways, taking into account the contextual issues that have an impact on their practice, and lecturers understand that practice is a process from which students build their knowledge and develop practical skills [6]. The labour market, the environment, and the student's future require acquired attitude and experience gained during lectures, rather than textbook knowledge and theoretical knowledge. The creative society sets new requirements for the future specialist. Those new undefined requirements must be implemented by the teacher. The teacher is tasked with developing the student's competences, which even the teacher may not have. No one has provided a list of necessary competences for a teacher and cannot provide one, at least not yet. Despite this, the study process continues without stopping. Therefore, the formulation of the list of competences is left to the participants of the study process themselves.

Thus, on the one hand, lecturers should continuously develop their competences in order to be able to organise student-centred studies. On the other hand, students should take more responsibility for their learning by becoming active participants in the study process. According to S. J. M. Harkema et al. [7], student-centred learning means that students are encouraged to establish their own goals and formulate their own performance objectives. It also implies that students formulate their own needs and requirements during the learning process. However, initially, students are not aware of their needs and therefore need external encouragement. It could be argued that the study programme outcomes will only be achieved through proper interaction between students and lecturers and that cooperation is only possible if these actors have a positive attitude towards each other. B. Abykanova et al. [8] argue that the active participation of students in the study process is the result of the lecturer's activity; therefore, the creative activity of students can be stimulated by systematically integrating them into various forms of educational and additional activities. The development of competences places its emphasis on the organisation of educational and cognitive activities by modelling diverse situations in various aspects of an individual's life. Consequently, the role of the higher education teacher, serving as a multifunctional figure that includes roles such as researcher, lecturer, psychologist, and others, is of considerable importance. In recent years, the role of the lecturer has not diminished due to the paradigm shift from teaching to learning, which places a greater focus on autonomous learning and the active participation of students in the study process. This shift is particularly significant in the implementation of the key provisions outlined in the Bologna Process documents [9].

Theoretical substantiation of the need for lecturer competences in response to student-centred studies. In Lithuania, research on higher education subjects, that is, lecturers, has started to increase with the change from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm when new challenges to the performance and competence of lecturers in higher education institutions were constantly emerging. The focus is shifting from the specific narrow activities or professional training of the lecturer to the broader context of the need for and development of competences and personality qualities. S. D. Reznik et al. [10] state that developing professionally subject-competent and pedagogically trained lecturers is a key challenge for universities seeking to ensure the quality of the training of professionals with higher education qualifications. In the new millennium, the educational process acquires a term of uncertainty, encouraging us to adapt to constant change, no longer expecting clearly defined frameworks or unambiguous results. The educator is seen as a creator of knowledge, not merely its transmitter [11]. It is important to stress that the shift of responsibility in education and the emphasis on values rather than knowledge and skills have been highlighted [12]. Thus, the importance of the interaction between the educator and the educatee in the educational process is brought up again, as the psychological

distance between the participants in the educational process limits the possibilities of applying interactive methods [13].

It should be mentioned that in the educational process, within a two-way communication between the lecturer/educator (as the information sender) and the student/educatee (as the information receiver), a pedagogical interaction is established that is primarily built on relationships. According to Aldona Palujanskienė [14], these relationships are influenced by various physiological, psychological, and social aspects. The ability of the educator (information sender) to communicate is one of these aspects. Pedagogical (educational) interaction occurs when there is a mutual exchange of information and an open dialogue between the educator and the educatee. It also occurs when students collaborate with each other. The relationship between communication and educational competences in the educational process is depicted in Figure 1.

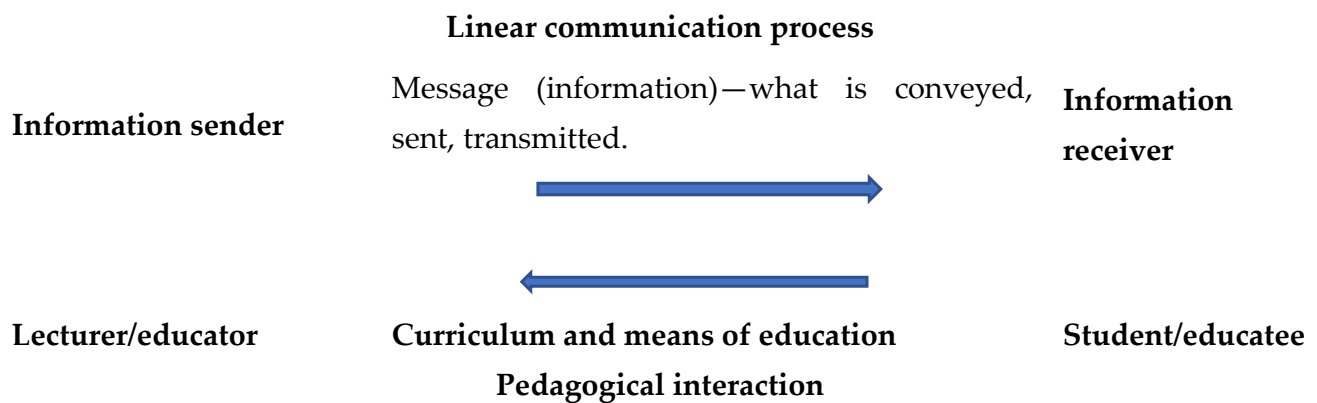


Figure 1. The link between communication and educational processes as an interaction between the lecturer and the student in the educational process. Source: [15].

Ann Bainbridge Frymier and Marian L. Houser [16] identify eight elements that comprise the communication process between lecturers and students: conversational skill (the ability to initiate, maintain, and conclude casual conversations in an enjoyable manner), referential skill (the ability to convey information clearly and unambiguously), ego-supportive skill (the ability to boost another person’s self-esteem), comforting skill (the ability to help others feel better when they are depressed, sad, or upset), conflict management (the ability to reach mutually satisfying solutions in conflicts), persuasive skill (the ability to influence people to modify their thoughts and behaviours), narrative skill (the ability to entertain through jokes, gossip, stories, etc.), and regulation (the ability to assist someone who has violated a norm in effectively rectifying their mistake). By generalising the definitions provided by these researchers and the elements they have identified, a clear connection between communication and educational competences can be established.

The new educational paradigm highlights the importance of creating partnership networks based not only on professionalism but also on personality, communication skills, and emotions. R. Sweetman [17] observes that the emerging trends in the concept of student-centred studies in higher education institutions show that there are closer relationships between students and lecturers, more in-depth feedback, and more collaboration between students and lecturers in small groups. However, student-centred studies in many cases require more resources in terms of lecturer time and input in planning and action compared to traditional approaches. Tijūnėlienė O. [9] observes that students make high demands on the lecturer as a researcher, as a conveyor of information, and as a person. The lecturer is expected to be an excellent researcher, able to organise the study process in an interactive and dynamic way, to motivate and inspire the student by example and by expressive language. Research shows that the identity of the lecturer, methodological, pedagogical, and psychological preparation, determines the quality of teaching in many ways. In

vocational training, it plays a strategic role in the development of the student's identity [10]. This means that any new challenge in education rests on the competences and personality of the educator because it is only from the educator that scientific, educational, and other changes in educational activities begin. Teachers, like everybody else, bring to their practice not only knowledge, professional skills, and a "theory in use," but also their personalities, their values, and their understanding of their role [18]. In agreement with Z. Abdullah et al. [19], knowledge and skills are the most easily understood and visible components of competence, while personal qualities are more difficult to identify, although they are extremely important components of competence. According to the researchers, there are two types of competences based on the model of "Icebreaker Competence": first, generic competences, which are the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities and behaviours that each member is expected to have in a given organisation/institution; and second, functional competences, which are the knowledge, specific personal qualities required to perform a specific job role and to take responsibility for the work activities [19]. After analysing documents and legal acts, V. Šlentnerienė and I. Tandzegorskienė [20] assert that the principal areas of a lecturer's activities encompass scientific, educational, pedagogical, methodological, administrative activities, and institutional representation. After analysing several works conducted on the activities of a lecturer by other researchers, D. Razmaite and D. Dagys [21] highlight the structure of a modern lecturer's competence: subject competence (orientation towards scientific innovations, creativity, a good knowledge of the subject matter, management of the audience's attention, and mastery of the methods of scientific activity), research competence (activities in the creation, application, and dissemination of new scientific knowledge), and educational competence (metacurricular learning, learning, teaching others). Higher education is a complex social phenomenon, the highest and most complex level of the education system, which transforms from the creation of formalised knowledge to new products, technologies, and the freedom of the researcher to create and disseminate innovations in a way that is comprehensible to the general public [20,22–24] under any changing conditions, including pandemics [25] and military conflicts. The student-centred learning that has been inspired in higher education institutions over the last decade is quite different from the traditional approach to teaching and learning. The differences are not only about what happens in the learning environment. In a philosophical approach to learning, student-centred learning differs because it is identified as a constructivist epistemology, rather than traditional learning, which tends to follow an epistemologically positivist approach [26]. Student-centred learning requires competent lecturers who are ready to contribute to university teaching through innovative methods, procedures, forms, models and systems. At present, the activities of university lecturers are based on a model of professionalism, research, and educational activities, which should encourage and motivate students to take an active part in the learning process through the use of different forms of teaching [27].

It is important to emphasise the role of the lecturer as a part of communication in the implementation of a sustainable study process. In agreement with KD. Madsen [28], the lecturers seek to draw on their own life experiences and adapt education for sustainable development to the different subjects, concentrating on, for instance, the communicative aspects of sustainable development. < . . . > The critical, democratic educational ideal seems to allow education for sustainable development to be integrated as part of the didactical thinking and practice within the different subjects—lecturers seek support in their efforts, but do not question the relevance of the work. The university has the ethical, academic, and peremptory responsibility to train education students and future trainers in sustainability. The University, as an educational institution committed to respect for the human person and to foster and defend human rights, should promote a culture of sustainability, which contributes to integral human development. To make this commitment more robust, it is necessary to incorporate education for sustainable development (ESD) into the curriculum of the University degrees [29]. In the new Sustainability 2.0 era of ESD transformation, the curriculum remains a highly important topic. In the future, there should be a greater

focus on the relationship between views of sustainability and development and the institutional arrangements that condition and influence views on education for sustainable development. < . . . > In some contexts more than others, students are not being challenged to cope with or even acknowledge the broader political and social agendas typical of stronger discourses at play in sustainable development [30]. T. H. Retnowati et al. [31] highlighted the evaluation model which can be used as a reference in evaluating lecturer performance as a consideration in improving lecturer performance holistically and sustainably. The result of developing an instrument for lecturer performance evaluation in this research shows that lecturer performance is evaluated based on four aspects: (1) teaching performance, (2) research performance, (3) community service performance, and (4) lecturers' capacity. The complexity of education for sustainable development competences requires the teaching of knowledge- and fact-based fundamentals as well as methodological research procedures for research-based and at the same time practice-oriented learning [32].

2. Research Design and Methodology

Lithuania operates with a binary higher education system that includes both universities and colleges. The survey was conducted within these two types of higher education institutions from September to November 2019, employing a questionnaire survey method and involving 390 respondents. The responses were provided by 59.4% of university students and 40.6% of college students, representing a wide spectrum of science fields, including 45.8% in social sciences, 18.8% in technological sciences, 16.5% in biomedical sciences, 13.4% in humanities, 3.6% in physical sciences, and 2.1% in arts sciences. The study encompassed all three levels of study. The majority of the responses (93.6%) were from bachelor's students, followed by 5.1% of master's students and 1.3% of Ph.D. students. The survey instrument was developed by the authors of this article to analyse students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the competences required by lecturers in the educational process. The research object was Lithuanian higher education students' opinions regarding lecturer competences. The aim was to unveil a model of lecturer competences and its relationship with the integration of sustainable development principles in student-centred learning.

Simple random sampling (probability sampling) was used to ensure that each member of the population had a probability of being included in the sample. Research methods included the analysis of scientific literature and documents and qualitative content analysis. The students were given an anonymous questionnaire with open-ended questions and the analysis of its results is presented in this article. Informants were asked to name three qualities of a good lecturer in order of priority: Option 1 as the most important trait/quality, Option 2 as a less important trait/quality, and Option 3 as an even less important trait/quality.

The data were analysed following these steps: familiarisation (the text is read, content is learned, and technical mistakes are eliminated); compilation (the most significant elements in the responses of every informant are identified); grouping (responses are grouped according to categories and subcategories); preliminary comparison of categories and subcategories (boundaries among categories and subcategories are established); and naming (categories and subcategories are named). Research data—the responses of the participants for all three options—were grouped according to their meaning into statements that formed a subcategory, and the subcategories were merged into a category (see Figure 2). Subcategories connected by logical connections formed a category of general meaning. These steps were performed by the authors of the article based on their intellectual potential: competences, experiences, analysis, and discussions. This article raises the following problem questions: (1) What competences should a lecturer have from the students' point of view to achieve student-centred studies? (2) What is the relationship between the competences of the lecturer and the implementation of sustainable development ideas in the organisation of student-centred studies? Research ethics: the data obtained from the study

were generalised without revealing the participants' affiliation to a city, a specific university, or a specific field of study.

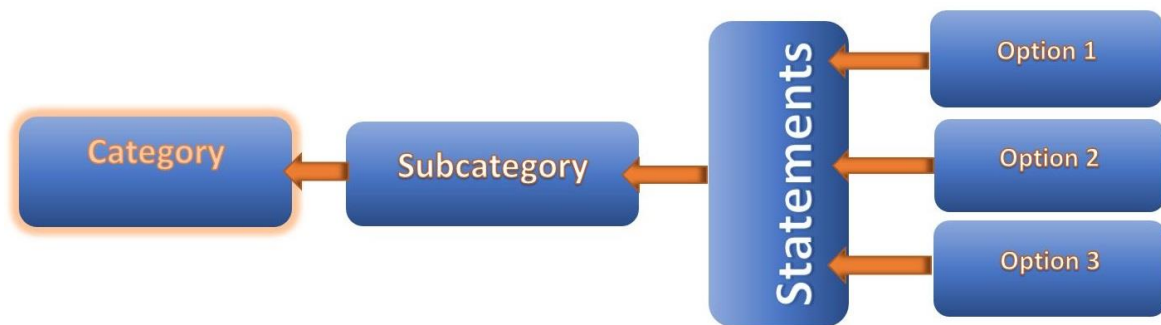


Figure 2. Scheme for categorising informants' responses.

The relevance of the statements to the informants is judged by the number of statements as Option 1 of the informants. The more statements are assigned to Option 1, the more significant it is. It is slightly less significant with Option 2 and Option 3 shows an even lesser degree of importance. The total number of statements from all options indicates the significance of the subcategory for the category. We can also discuss the breadth of the subcategory: the greater the number of qualitative statements within a subcategory, the broader the subcategory. Breadth may be related to the diversity of the subcategory, but it can also be linked to the dispersion of content. Dispersion arises from the wide variety of individual responses from informants, making it challenging to align them with other statements in terms of meaning.

The responses of the informants were grouped into three categories according to their meaning: educational competence, subject competence, and values underlying the personality of the lecturer. The results of the study are in line with the results of the research literature by V. Šlentnerienė and I. Tandzegokskienė [20], who report that Lithuanian university lecturers, who hold the positions of assistant lecturers, lecturers, associate professors, and professors, implement pedagogical, scientific, and methodological activities in order to meet the requirements of their posts. The above-mentioned researchers note that job descriptions of some universities also require the performance of expert, educational, professional development and organisational activities. This suggests that multidisciplinary is a naturally occurring necessity and a reality. It is like a long-term process that has become common knowledge in society and an integral part of the perception of teaching.

3. Research Results

The phenomenon of lecturer competences in the context of student-centred learning: an empirical substantiation. The analysis of the survey data shows that the most important category for Lithuanian students is the educational competence of the lecturer (98 statements), followed by the category of personality (76 statements) and the category of subject competence (61 statements). The study findings show that the category of educational competence is composed of three subcategories: communication, organisation of the student-centred learning process, and structured and planned teaching (see Table 1). The results of the study suggest that educational competence can be described as a phenomenon. The phenomenon manifests itself in the fact that educational competence is based on subconstructs, most of which are the communication skills of the lecturer.

Table 1. The category of educational competence, its subcategories, and selection of statements.

Category	Subcategory	Statements	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	In Total
Educational Competence	Communication	Lecturer's communication with students	5	5	6	16
		Creating interaction with students	1	6	5	12
		Collaboration	1	5	0	6
		Rhetorical skills for teaching	2	3	2	7
		Accurate explanation of the task	0	0	1	1
		5 statements	9	19	14	42
	Organisation of student-centred study process	Evoking student interest	7	6	1	14
		Applying different methods and forms	1	3	3	7
		Motivation	1	0	4	5
		Encouraging discussion	1	1	2	4
		Providing appropriate examples	1	1	0	2
		Technological awareness	0	1	0	1
		6 statements	11	12	10	33
	Structured and planned teaching	Consistent and systematic explanation of the topic	4	10	4	18
		Revision	0	1	0	1
		Clear assessment system	0	2	1	3
		Link with other subjects	0	1	0	1
		4 statements	4	14	5	23
			15	24	45	29

The subcategory of lecturer communication is the most significant for students, as the statements that make up this subcategory were mentioned as many as 42 times in total as all three options. In the process of communication, the lecturer takes on an important role as an educator, which can influence the student's personality and create the preconditions for the future adoption of a style of teaching, communication, and speaking. The most important statement in the subcategory is the lecturer's communication with students, as it was mentioned more times than the other statements as Option 1 (5 in total) and 16 times when all the options are taken together. This implies that it is important for students to have the lecturer interact with them, presumably in other educational environments than just during lectures. The importance of another statement, i.e., creating interaction with students, confirms this prediction, as it is mentioned 6 times as Option 2 and 12 times in total. One of the most important conditions of education is the establishment of the interaction between the learner and the educator. This is also where the phenomenon of the relationship of competences comes into play, as communication skills become very important in order to establish a relationship between the lecturer and the student.

Another significant subcategory of educational competence is the organisation of the student-centred study process, which was mentioned 33 times as all three options. Students find it very important that lecturers are able to evoke their interest in the course of the lectures or in the subject in general (the statement "evoking student interest" is mentioned 7 times in Option 1, and 14 times in total, which is a significant emphasis on the importance of this statement compared to the other statements). In addition, there is a visible desire among students to learn in an active way, where lecturers use a variety of methods and forms (seven statements in total) and encourage discussion (four statements in total).

The close link between education and communication is again evident in encouraging discussion. This proves once again that the communication skills of the lecturer strengthen and expand the field of student-centred studies. Certainly, the ability of the lecturer to motivate (five statements in total), to act, to assume part of the responsibility for study achievements, etc., is important for the organisation of student-centred studies. This is supported by research conducted by S.R. Wallder et al. [26], which also shows that students find traditional didactic teaching models less inspiring, less motivating and less effective than student-centred learning.

The third subcategory is structured and planned teaching, where the most significant aspect in terms of overall educational competence is the ability of the lecturer to explain the topic in a coherent and systematic way (the statement is mentioned 18 times: 4 times as Option 1, 10 times as Option 2, and 4 times as Option 3). This subcategory confirms the findings of the study by N. Čirič [27], which shows that a high level of quality teaching requires basic teaching skills, which are part of the lecturer's educational and didactic-methodological competences.

The findings of the study are in line with the visions set out in the Bologna Communiqué of Yerevan [33] on the necessary change in teaching methods to meet the expectations and real needs of the present student. The results of the study are in line with the results of a phenomenological study published by O. Tijūnėlienė [9]. The most important thing for students is that the lecturer is able to evoke their interest in the material presented in the lecture. Students expect active, dynamic, motivating and engaging lectures that use a variety of methods and the latest technologies. The study shows that students also attach importance to the vocation of the lecturer and to the powerful, expressive language of the lecturer. The study by G. Tolutienė [5] reveals that elder learners want communication and support from the lecturer. Younger students expect the lecturer to be able to organise the learning process, taking into account the heterogeneity of the group and the size of the group, to be able to select interesting and effective methods for the lecture, and to offer advice [5]. Insights into the conducted research show that communication skills are needed in the educational process of applying active learning methods in order to realise student-centred learning. After all, the ability to structure a lecture is equivalent to the ability to plan and structure the content of a speech (message) for the appropriate audience, which is also an element of communication.

According to the students, the second most important category is the personality of the lecturer, which consists of three subcategories: benevolence towards others, personal relationship with the self and others, and firmness in one's relationship with others (see Table 2). Since the lecturer is a participant in the communication (academic) process (the lecturer—the message—the student), the category of personality is the main link between educational and communication competences. This category reveals a set of personality traits of the lecturer as a participant in the communication process, which are important for students. Personality influences both smooth communication in the study process and the development of the relationship between the lecturer and the student (communication participants). And the created relationship improves motivation, engagement in learning, and other deep learning processes.

The most significant subcategory of the personality category is benevolence towards others, which consists of 11 statements that were mentioned a total of 47 times within the three options. According to the students, the most important characteristic of a lecturer is understanding (the statement is mentioned as many as 25 times: 10 times as Option 1, 6 times as Option 2, and 9 times as Option 3). This could also be related to the willingness to communicate expressed in the first category, but in this subcategory, it is complemented by qualitative personality expressions such as tolerance (mentioned 5 times: 2 times as Option 1, 2 times as Option 2, and 1 time as Option 3), as well as simplicity, sincerity, etc. The subcategory of personality is narrower and consists of six statements that were mentioned 23 times in total under the three options. In this subcategory, the most important qualities of a lecturer are honesty (3 times as Option 1; 9 times in total) and responsibility

(2 times as Option 1; 8 times in total). The narrowest subcategory of the personality category is firmness in relation to others, which consists of only three statements (fairness, strictness, thoroughness) that are of similar importance to the students. Students expect an understanding, honest, responsible, simple, tolerant, and fair lecturer. The results of the study are in line with the results of O. Tijūnėlienė's [9] phenomenological study that students are interested in the lecturer's relationship with the audience, the creation of spiritual connections, educational interaction, and the lecturer's internal culture. Through hard work recognised by students, the lecturer creates conditions for active learning, individual meaning making, reflection, and motivation to attend lectures.

Table 2. The category of lecturer personality, its subcategories, and selection of statement.

Category	Subcategory	Statements	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	In Total
Lecturer's Personality	Benevolence towards others	Understanding	10	6	9	25
		Tolerance	2	2	1	5
		Simplicity	0	3	2	5
		Humanity	1	2	0	3
		Sincerity	0	3	0	3
		Eloquence	1	0	0	1
		Goodwill	1	0	0	1
		Commitment	1	0	0	1
		Helpfulness	0	0	1	1
		Broad-mindedness	0	0	1	1
		Gentleness	0	0	1	1
	11 statements	16	16	15	47	
Personal relationship with the self and others	Honesty	3	2	4	9	
	Responsibility	2	2	4	8	
	Openness	3	0	0	3	
	Reliability	0	1	0	1	
	Youthfulness	0	0	1	1	
	Liberty	0	0	1	1	
	6 statements	8	5	10	23	
Firmness in relationship to other people	Fairness	0	2	1	3	
	Strictness	1	0	1	2	
	Thoroughness	0	1	1	2	
	3 statements	1	3	3	7	
		20	25	24	28	76

The third category of subject competence identified in the study consists of three subcategories: subject knowledge, attitude to work, and professionalism (see Table 3).

Table 3. The category of subject competence, its subcategories, and selection of statements.

Category	Subcategory	Statements	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	In Total
Subject Competence	Professionalism	A professional in own field	25	3	7	35
		Authority	0	0	3	3
		2 statements	25	3	10	38
	Attitude towards work	Initiative	0	1	2	3
		Organisation	2	0	0	2
		Directedness	2	0	0	2
		Versatility	2	0	0	2
		Curiosity	1	0	1	2
		Creativity	0	2	0	2
		Love for work	0	0	2	2
		Flexibility	0	0	2	2
		Responsibility to prepare for lectures	1	0	0	1
		Diligence	1	0	0	1
		Commitment	1	0	0	1
		Insight	0	1	0	1
		Thoroughness	0	0	1	1
		Orderliness	0	0	1	1
		14 statements	10	4	9	23
		3	16	35	7	19

Although at the category level, the subject competence is the third most important (61 statements in total); it should be noted that the subcategory of professionalism is the most significant among all the others, as the statement “*a professional in own subject*” is mentioned as many as 25 times in Option 1, and 35 times in total. This means that it is very important for students to acquire subject knowledge during their studies to prepare them for the future, but, as mentioned above, it is also very important how that knowledge is acquired and how it is communicated or presented. The second most significant and broadest subcategory of all is that of attitude towards work, which consists of as many as 14 statements that were mentioned 23 times in total within all three options. Organisation (2 times), directedness (2 times), and versatility (2 times) are more important and chosen as Option 1. The subcategory of professionalism consists of two groups of statements: a professional in their own field (seven statements: five statements as Option 1; two statements as Option 2) and authority (three statements as Option 3). A student at the beginning of the 21st century expects, first of all, lecturers to have excellent knowledge of their subject and/or even to be leaders in their subject area. The professionalism subcategory (38 in total) is more important than the attitude subcategory (23 in total) towards work. A professional in their own field is significantly more significant for students than the teacher’s attitude to their work (as many as 12 statements describe the attitude to work). We can see the significance of the teacher’s work, time, and experience for a young person. The student focuses on the result of the work—professionalism. Therefore, the attitude to work, which was the basis for the current results, becomes less important. It can be compared to watching a movie. The viewer only cares about the result. Only a very small part of the audience is interested in the behind-the-scenes of the making of the film. Only gossip and sensational news attract more interest from viewers. At the same time, this fact allows us to assume that the student is not interested in the process of

becoming a teacher and does not see themselves in the teaching profession in the future. However, according to C. Luguetti et al. [34], it could be argued that the development of professional identity is a complex process, consisting not only of what others think or say about lecturers but also of how lecturers see themselves and of their ability to reflect on their own experiences. This is closely related to the second category of personality.

To clarify the qualitative research data and describe the need for lecturer competences in student-centred studies, all three categories are combined into a single picture, as they are closely interrelated, directly interdependent, and reveal the totality of the lecturer's competences from the point of view of the students (Figure 3). According to Blaskova et al. [35], a competency is a summation of the key professional and personal skills/talents, patterns of behaviour that need to be possessed and exhibited by an individual in order to succeed in the fulfilment of defined professional goals, and related professional tasks, duties and responsibilities. In other words, competence is the aggregate of knowledge, skills, experience, and personal attributes that support the achievement of a goal. Thus, the figure shows the subcategories and statements that were the most selected as Option 1 by the students and/or the most frequently selected.

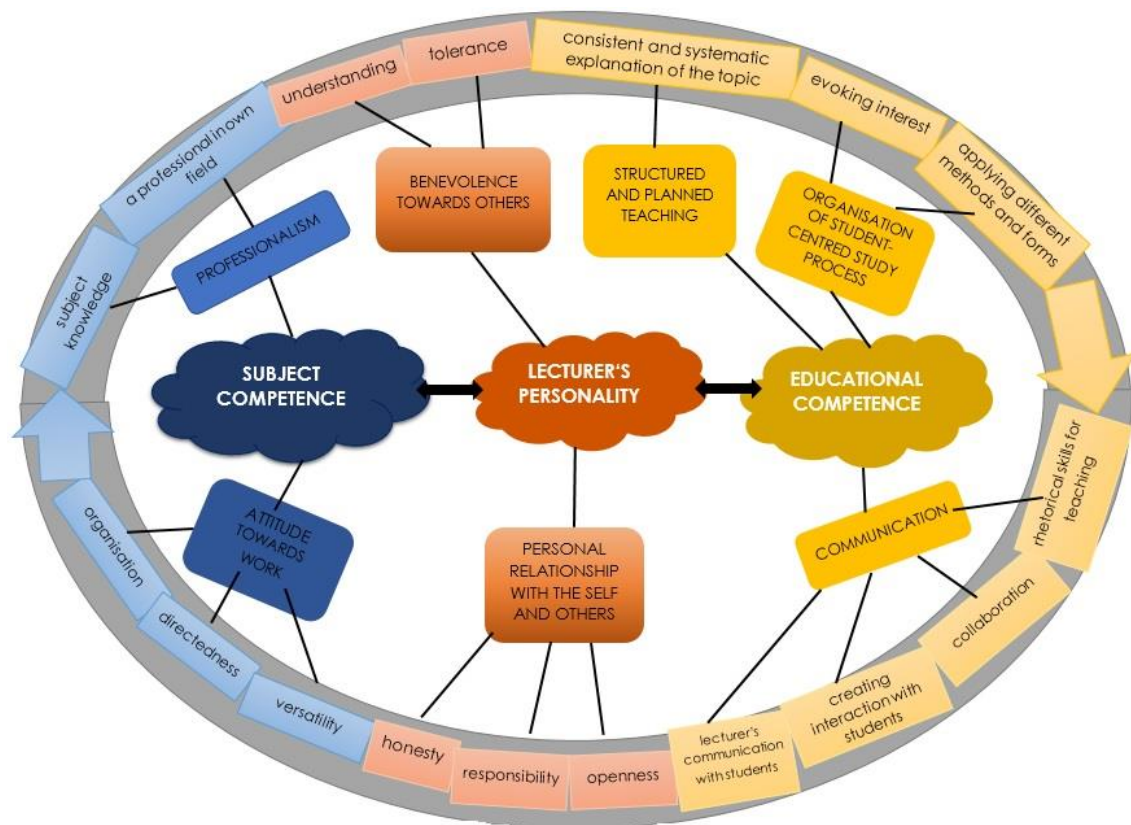


Figure 3. The phenomenon of lecturer competences in student-centred studies in the early 21st century: students' perspective.

Thus, in the context of student-centred studies, professionalism, a component of a lecturer's subject competence, becomes the most important element when it comes to the phenomenon of the relationship between lecturer communication and educational competences. It is important for students to acquire knowledge and development in their chosen field of specialisation, which is possible when they are facilitated by a lecturer with a personality who is strong and versatile in his/her internal and external qualities of character, professional in his/her subject knowledge, and flexible in his/her ability "to juggle" that knowledge in the context of student-centred studies. It is in this context that educational competence based on communication skills becomes important. It is

also important to emphasise the importance of the lecturer's attitude to work, in terms of organisation, directedness, and versatility. The phenomenon of the lecturer's competences is the lecturer's own personality, which maintains a benevolent relationship with others (being understanding and tolerant) and combines this with their own personal internal qualities—honesty, responsibility, and openness. According to students, it is of utmost importance for a lecturer to be able to impart all the accumulated subject knowledge in a structured and planned manner, to communicate fluently, and to organise studies using a variety of study methods and forms. According to students, it is of utmost importance for a lecturer to be able to impart all the accumulated subject knowledge in a structured and planned manner, to communicate fluently, and to organise studies using a variety of study methods and forms.

Here, we can see parallels between critical pedagogy [18] and design education [36]. The model for design education is the design studio, an educational setting where students practice designing under the supervision of a teacher. In this context, individual meetings between a teacher and a student take a central role. The key element of these meetings is the dialogue—an intimate and direct conversation regarding the student's evolving design project. This interaction between the teacher and student is a distinctive feature of design education. Despite being brief and spontaneous, these everyday discussions serve as the foundation of the teaching and learning process within the studio. Each conversation, one after another, contributes to the student's developing understanding of the design process. Although knowledge about design is often characterised as tacit, implicit, and elusive, the studio requires the teacher to articulate and clarify the design process for the student. Consequently, insights into design naturally arise from conversations with students. It is noteworthy that, within the design studio's context, there is inherent unpredictability in the organic unfolding of tutorials between teachers and students. The design project serves as a focal point that anchors the attention of both the teacher and student in a pragmatic dialogue. The pivotal moment is the transformation of perspectives and progress in the process. Furthermore, individual attitude changes naturally lead to broader social transformations, forming the foundation for sustainable development. While the educational principles of the design studio hold significant value and uniqueness, they may not be immediately apparent to an external observer.

The relationship between educational and communication competences as a prerequisite for the implementation of sustainable development ideas in higher education. The importance of lecturer competences for student–lecturer interaction is reflected in many areas. For example, the beginning of the 21st century has highlighted the need to implement the ideas of sustainable development in education and in all areas of human activity. At the same time, society is undergoing a transformation from a knowledge society to a creative society. In addition, the world has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic [26]. All these changes and emergencies have posed innumerable challenges for education [37], and more specifically, for the lecturer, who is the implementer of higher education, the educational communicator between the macro (political, social, economic, etc.) and micro (national, higher education institution, faculty, group, etc.) environments and the student. Sustainable development ideas can become a tangible reality if students develop critical thinking, a holistic approach, lifelong learning, and responsibility for their personal and professional choices. Everything in the world is connected in cycles. We are talking about a profound transformation of personal values that begins to take place during the interaction between the lecturer and the student. Therefore, it is fair to say that, in the process of studying, the lecturers themselves become the organisers and instruments of the implementation of communication. The success of this process is determined by the phenomenon of the lecturer's competences, which should be continuously studied, revised, refined, updated, and adjusted. The competences of the lecturer become a prerequisite for sustainable processes (Figure 4).

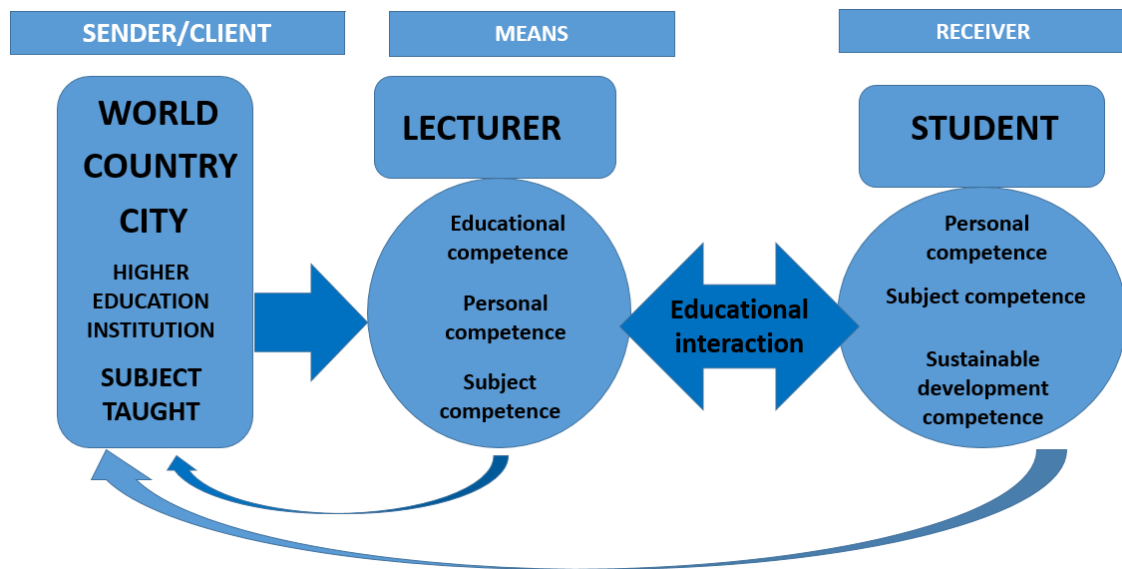


Figure 4. The lecturer as a part of communication in implementing a sustainable study process.

The types and parts of competences can only be deconstructed and analysed theoretically, simulating laboratory conditions. In reality, human behaviour and decisions are the result of the aggregate of personality. Thus, due to the lecturer's competence, qualitative changes in the student occur during the process of educational interaction. The subject-related knowledge, which is permeated with the ideas of sustainable development, becomes an integral part of the future professional. The educational interaction begins and ends with the communication between the lecturer and the student.

According to the findings of the study described in this article, a higher education lecturer develops a teaching plan that promotes not only mastery of subject material but also develops general life competences such as critical thinking, analytical skills, and problem solving. Lecturers can incorporate multidimensional learning into academic sessions, encouraging students to learn from their own experiences and to interact and share ideas with others. Lecturers should have excellent communication skills to convey information to students in a clear and understandable way. This helps students better understand the material being taught. They can also offer one-to-one counseling to help students clarify their difficulties and better target their development. Lecturers should continuously develop their subject expertise in order to provide cutting-edge information to students and encourage them to explore their subject. In this way, it demonstrates the importance of lifelong learning and illustrates the lifelong learning paradigm. In order to ensure sustainable development, lecturers should endeavour to integrate these competences into their teaching material and to ensure that students not only learn the facts but also acquire the skills that will be useful for their personal and professional development. This will help support the long-term growth of students and their ability to adapt to the changing needs of society.

4. Discussion

According to L. Duobliené [11], in the process of manoeuvring between educational tradition and novelty, it is worth shifting the focus from the preponderance of one side to the search for unique meanings, the combination of hitherto incompatible phenomena, and the discovery of new syntheses. A rapidly changing society (post-industrial knowledge creation), [38] in the context of a changing social, economic, and technological environment, poses ever-new goals for the education system [39–42]. Education is an inert system. Change starts with one person, then with each person, and later still with their ability to communicate.

According to the findings of the study described in the article, the category of educational competence in the context of the study points to the unity of classics and innovations in education. The basic concept of the educational process and the principles of organising the process remain unchanged at the beginning of the 21st century. However, times impose a necessary change, dictated by the evolving approach of the younger generation to the process of development. The studies in the 21st century should be relevant to the times in terms of their content and form [2,39,40,43], engaging, active, and evoke positive emotions, while maintaining the interaction between the lecturer and student [2], dialogue between teacher and student [36]. In addition, according to S. Wilhelm et al. [44], to develop and promote creative thinking and expression [45], critical thinking, and problem solving [39,43], didactic (educational) competence and a thorough understanding of how to apply it focusing on competency-based student learning are essential for university lecturers.

In the study, communication skills are presented as part of educational competence, based on the fact that both study and educational activities take place in higher education institutions. And communication is used as a means to achieve these learning outcomes. It should be noted that in the processes of communication and education, not only the relationship between the information sender and the receiver but also an environment that is appropriate and favourable for communication and other aspects gain significance. According to psychologist A. Petruelytė [46], to start speaking, an individual has to feel a need to do it and a motive to convey or write information expressing their own emotional state. Hence, in such a situation, the personality qualities of the lecturer become important, such as the impact of the speakers (the sender of the information) on the audience and their set of values, and the ability to remain committed to their stated values. K. Pukelis et al. [47] join the abovementioned opinion and describe a lecture as a way of communication, where the lecturer's information, gestures, facial expression, body language, and eye contact can contribute to or, on the contrary, hinder memorising the presented content. Thus, it can be concluded that lecturers who communicate in the educational process become the conveyors of professional knowledge. They can also have or already have an influence on the student as a personality.

According to N. Čirič [27], a student expects to listen to a methodical lecturer in the classroom, who keeps the attention in the lecture in a natural way, and whose knowledge is understandable and structured. Thus, it could be argued that communication skills—the basics of classroom management, which is a part of communication—are important in theoretical lectures and practical classes. The communication skills of the lecturer play a vital role in facilitating the control and organisation of the study process, leading to improved learning outcomes, enhanced comprehension of subject matter, increased creativity, and the development of critical thinking. This is accomplished through the implementation of linguistic and technological solutions, including virtual learning environments and educational apps. According to the survey results, students express a desire for active and engaging instructional methods, a clear and structured presentation of course material, and a transparent assessment system. The findings of this study align with the results from O. Tījūnēlienė's study [9], which revealed that senior students, in particular, value well-structured lessons, the clear presentation of main ideas, logical information flow, and explicit connections to the competences within the study program, as well as the subject and topic being taught.

The findings of the study reflect the current situation in higher education policy, encouraging the development of a system for the improvement in lecturers' educational competences [33]. Having analysed the experience of higher education institutions in different countries, researchers B. Jatkauskienė and G. Le Boterf [1] argue that the educational development of lecturers can be implemented in the university's strategy in a variety of ways. Universities in Europe and around the world have introduced or are introducing a variety of models for the development of lecturers' educational competence (didactic preparedness), ranging from mandatory national requirements to allowing universities to

address it themselves by setting up didactic centres. In light of recent trends, it is possible to argue that the exchange of experiences is a characteristic of modern educational activity, which helps to expand the professional capacities of lecturers and to reevaluate the effectiveness of the educational process. Lecturers are aware of the need for continuous professional development, which increases their professional and subject competences and improves the quality of education [26,37,41,48].

5. Conclusions

Student-centred studies should be promoted both by the higher education institution through internal change and by the teaching staff by understanding the implications of change and supporting it through their actions. The possession and continuous development of lecturers' educational and general competences, as well as personal development and subject competences, are becoming particularly relevant. This is confirmed by the results of the study discussed in the paper, which show the students' attitudes towards the phenomenon/competences of the lecturer in student-centred studies. Analysing the survey data and calculating the total number of statements mentioned in the category, it can be seen that the most important category for Lithuanian students is the educational competence of the lecturer (98 chosen statements), which includes, to a large extent, communication competence (42 statements); a smaller category is personality competence (77 chosen statements), and an even smaller category is the category of subject competence (61 chosen statements). However, upon deeper analysis, dissociating from the categories and subcategories and focusing solely on those statements designated under Option 1, the ones most frequently mentioned by students, it becomes evident that students highly value having a lecturer who is a professional in the subject they teach. The pivotal aspect of a lecturer's competence shifts towards the lecturer's values, where both extrinsic (manifested as benevolence towards others) and intrinsic (manifested as one's relationship with oneself) values and qualities assume significant importance for students. The phenomenon of the relationship between educational and communication competences has also emerged. Students expect a clear and coherent presentation of course material, collaborative opportunities, the ability to evoke student interest, and active interaction with students. Qualitative analysis of the research data suggests a synthesis of educational traditions and innovative approaches. However, the demands of the times call for a necessary shift considering the evolved approach of the younger generation to the learning process. In the 21st century, education should be engaging, interactive, and emotionally resonant, fostering a close and positive interaction between lecturers and students. The trends of modern studies are looking for ever-new ways of teaching and learning. For example, the model for design education is the design studio, an educational setting where students practice designing under the supervision of a teacher. This interaction between the teacher and student is a distinctive feature of design education. In this context, individual meetings between a teacher and a student take a central role. The key element of these meetings is the dialogue—an intimate and direct conversation regarding the student's evolving design project. Consequently, insights into design naturally arise from conversations with students. Only a professional can manage such a process inconspicuously.

The critical, democratic educational ideal seems to allow education for sustainable development to be integrated as part of the didactical thinking and practice within the different subjects. The university has the ethical, academic, and peremptory responsibility to train education students and future trainers in sustainability. The University, as an educational institution committed to respect for the human person and to foster and defend human rights, should promote a culture of sustainability, which contributes to integral human development. In the study process, lecturers seek support in their efforts but do not question the relevance of the work. The competences of higher education lecturers, including their compositional, quantitative, and qualitative attributes, as well as their adaptability to changing times, serve as a fundamental requirement for the integration of sustainable development principles within higher education institutions. Emphasis

and significance are placed on the alignment between the educational and communication competences of lecturers. Ideas that are not effectively communicated often remain confined to written papers or within the lecturer's mind. The lecturer's personal and professional qualities converge to establish a connection with the student, where interaction emerges as a pivotal element. Through this interaction, the lecturer not only imparts subject-specific knowledge but also nurtures values essential to the profession and personal growth. Additionally, they cultivate skills that meet the demands of the contemporary era, including critical thinking, analytical abilities, and problem solving. Within the educational process, lecturers themselves take on the roles of organisers and facilitators of communication. The success of this process depends on the phenomenon of lecturer competences, which requires continuous evaluation, revision, refinement, and adaptation. Lecturer competences stand as an imperative foundation for cohesive educational processes.

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