

KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY *CHILDHOOD PEDAGOGY* STUDY PROGRAMME STUDENTS' CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LEARNING PROVISIONS AND STUDY QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Higher education, scientific research and innovations play a significant role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness. The *Bologna Process* documents note the importance of the involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education. The aim of the article is to reveal the connections between learning provisions and study quality of the Klaipėda University (hereinafter: KU) *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students. 131 students of Klaipėda University *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme were interviewed by means of a questionnaire. The research reveals that students' attitudes towards individual determinants of the study quality are related to the learning provisions that they follow. Students have identified most important factors affecting the quality of studies: relationship between the student and the university teacher, student motivation to learn, teaching/learning methods and university teacher competences. The results of the research can help university management team, programme curators to enhance educational processes at the university by improving the quality of studies.

KEY WORDS: *students' learning provisions, quality of the study, study programme.*

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Introduction

Higher education is an essential element of social, economic and cultural development, while scientific research and innovation play an important role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global

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competitiveness (The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015). Lithuania's Progress Strategy 2030 (2012) highlights one of the key goals – learning society, to create an effective system of lifelong learning, effectively adapting information communication technologies and ensuring acquisition and development of knowledge and skills required for an active society.

In the context of globalization of society, transformation of science and labour market, “the reason for the paradigm shift [of the higher education] – an aim to prepare a student to perform one's role in society as best as possible, to realize oneself, to be an active citizen, who is able to improve in the workplace and meet expectations of the workplace” becomes evident (Lepaitė, 2012: 6). Therefore, the quality assurance in higher education is regarded as a priority goal of the Lithuanian education system (Law on Science and Studies, 2009; The National Education Strategy for 2013-2022, 2013).

The goal of the development of the Klaipėda city and western region of Lithuania is to have an innovative system of education and science, which meets the needs of the future economy, a developed and innovation-oriented education, science and business cooperation ecosystem, as well as an innovative specialist, who meets the needs of the future economy (*Klaipėda 2030: Vision, Development Scenario and Strategic Directions*, 2017). Hence, one of the essential objectives of KU is to ensure and improve the quality of studies of specialists.

Study quality assurance is an ongoing process that is dependent on external monitoring and internal quality assurance mechanisms developed at each university. The organization of the study process is one of the main activities of a higher education institution, the efficiency of which is determined by various factors (students, university teachers, interaction between them, infrastructure, etc.). The assessment of the quality of study process is relevant and valuable in updating study programmes by providing further opportunities for the improvement of the study process (Norvilienė, 2015).

Given the paradigm shift in higher education not only in Lithuania, but also in the whole of Europe, student-oriented studies are becoming especially relevant (Markevičienė, Račkauskas, 2011). The Bologna Process documents and the works of researchers (Loukkola, Zhang, 2010; Elassy, 2013; Ryan, 2015; Logermann, Leišytė, 2015; Matei, Iwinska, 2016; Merabishvili, Tsereteli, Bellon, 2017) note the importance of the involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education. According to B. Wächter, M. Kelo, et al. (2015) it is important to take into account the needs and expectations of all students, as well as to meet the expectations of all parties concerned, while supporting constant enhancement.

Research on students' opinions on the issues of study quality is analysed in the works of Lithuanian and foreign scientists: students' attitudes towards the dimensions of the higher education (Akareem, Hossain, 2016; Wang, Sun, Jiang, 2018); quality of teaching, study programmes (Galiniene, Martinavičius, 2011; Bobrova, Grajauskas, Alūzas, 2012; Lamanauskas, Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, 2016; Fransson, Lindberg, Olofsson, 2018), provision of feedback during the study process (Norvilienė, Juškienė, 2012, Evans, 2013; Ajjawi, Boud, 2017; Carless, Boud, 2018), graduates' attitudes towards Master's studies (Pilkienė, Sajienė, 2013; O'Leary, 2017), vision for quality studies of future teachers (Žibėnienė, Barkauskaitė, 2014); research on the quality of studies at private and public universities (Naidu, Derani, 2016), etc.

Problem. In spite of the extensive systematic and institutional research on study quality, there are no clear criteria for assessing the quality of studies. Study quality is assessed according to the selected criteria or tools developed by a researcher or groups of researchers: management level of higher education institution, compliance of the study programme with the current labour market, professionalism of university teachers, level of internationality, choice of studies, student support, assessment of the university's mission, aims and management, assessment of material resources, etc.

The assessment of the quality of studies of the Klaipėda University *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students requires to analyse students' attitudes concerning their satisfaction with studies. Problematic issues raised:

- what is the attitude of the KU *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students towards the factors that influence the quality of studies?
- what are the connections between the learning provisions and the quality of studies for the KU *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students?

Research object: learning provisions of students and study quality connections.

Research aim: to reveal the connections between learning provisions and study quality of the KU *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students.

Research methods: review of scientific literature and documents, questionnaire survey, statistical data analysis.

Research methodology.

Subjects. The empirical research was conducted to reveal the connections between the learning provisions and study quality of the KU *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students. 131 students of full-time and part-time first- and second-cycle studies were interviewed. Respondents were chosen by probabilistic sampling. The demographic description of 131 respondents is presented in Table 1. The majority of subjects were students of the full-time session-based mode of studies (55.7%), distribution according to the year of studies was even, first – 36 (27.5%), second – 31 (23.7%), third – 33 (25.2%), fourth – 31 (23.7%) year students. In respect of the study funding, the majority of subjects were students, whose studies are funded by the state (53.4%) and students, who pay for their studies from their own earnings (34.4%). The assessment of the distribution of students' age groups shows that the largest group is 24 – 34 y.o. (39.7 %) participants. The majority of respondents carry out pedagogical work – 85 (64.9%). In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were women – 130 (99.2%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Features	Number (N)	Percent (%)
Year of study		
1	36	27.5
2	31	23.7
3	33	25.2
4	31	23.7
Mode of studies		
Full-time studies	28	21.4
Part-time studies	30	22.9
Full-time session-based studies	73	55.7
Cycle of study		
First	97	74.0
Second	34	26.0
Study funding		
Pay for studies from their own earnings	45	34.4
Use targeted loans to pay for studies	3	2.3
Studies are paid for by parents	10	7.6
Studies are fully funded by the state	70	53.4
Other	3	2.3
Age groups		
18 – 23 y.o.	31	23.7
24 – 34 y.o.	52	39.7
35 – 58 y.o.	48	36.6
Carry out pedagogical work		
Yes	85	64.9
No	46	35.1

Research organization and instrument. The research data were collected using the written survey method. The original questionnaire in Lithuanian compiled by the authors was used for the survey. The questionnaire was developed in the google.forms environment and the link was sent to the personal e-mails of all 145 students, studying in the *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme. The questionnaire consisted of four parts of closed-ended questions.

The questions in the first part sought to identify *socio-demographic characteristics of students*.

The question in the second part sought to find out *how students assess the quality of studies in their higher education institution*. Students were asked to rate on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = Very Bad to 5 = Very Good.

The question in the third part sought to reveal students' attitude towards factors that influence the quality of the study process. 11 statements were presented: *Structure of the study programme; Curriculum of the study subject; Teaching methods; Individual work tasks; Methods of reporting for individual work tasks; University teacher competences; Student motivation; Interpersonal relationships with university teachers; Interpersonal relationships with classmates; Material base (library, data bases, hardware, etc.); Provision of information about the organization of the study process*.

Respondents were asked to rate each statement by selecting the answer option (definitely yes, yes, I don't know, no, definitely no). The following study quality factors were distinguished on the basis of education documents (Law on Science and Studies, 2009; The National Education Strategy for 2013-2022, 2013; The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015) and conducted research (Galiniénė, Martinavičius, 2011; Bobrova, Grajauskas, Alūzas, 2012; Norvilienė, 2015; Akareem, Hossain, 2016; Lamanauskas, Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, 2016; Fransson, Lindberg, Olofsson, 2018; Wang, Sun, Jiang, 2018, et al.). The reliability of the study quality factor scale was assessed by measuring the internal consistency of the variables that make up the scale. Since it was determined that the scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0,839, the whole scale can be considered to be a homogenous and a reliable measurement instrument.

The question in the fourth part sought to determine students' attitude towards the kind of learning motive they choose during their studies. Students had to choose from the following motives: *It is important for me to meet the minimum requirements during my studies, balancing between hard studying and striving not to be dropped out; It is important for me to study on the basis of conscious interest and the development of competence in studying each specific study subject; It is important for me to get the highest grades, whether or not it was interesting to study*.

With an emphasis on the student-centred education and students' responsibility for their own learning, independent learning is at the heart of the study process. Researchers of independent learning (Fallows, Steven, 2000; Teresevičienė, Kaminskienė, Žydzūnaitė, Gedvilienė, 2012) assign independent learning to the general, life's important skills: to assess, reflect, analyse one's learning. According to researchers, independent learning also promotes self-reliance in solving problems, making decisions and organizing learning activities. The development of the following skills requires a lot of time, and many learners need special training and organization of appropriate learning.

Independent learning can be described as learning during which learners are able to independently acquire knowledge, carry out research and critically assess. Independent learning is characterized by the critical assessment of the environment and its use to achieve learning goals. In this context, the environment is perceived as a physical environment (the place where learning is conducted), resources, learning styles, methods and associates (colleagues, university teachers, employers, etc.) (Teresevičienė, Kaminskienė, Žydzūnaitė, Gedvilienė, 2012). In terms of independent learning, it is possible to single out superficial, deep, and achievement-focused learning.

The following research distinguished between the motives of the students' independent learning on the basis of exactly the three learning approaches identified by Marton and Saljo (1976), Biggs (1987), i.e. superficial, deep and achievement-oriented: *it is important for me to meet the minimum requirements during my studies, balancing between hard studying and striving not to be dropped out* is assigned to superficial learning motive; *it is important for me to study on the basis of conscious interest and the development of competence in studying each specific study subject* is assigned to deep learning motive; and *it is important for me to get the highest grades, whether or not it was interesting to study* is assigned to achievement-focused learning motive.

Data analysis. The data obtained during the research were processed using the SPSS software (version 24). The following methods of statistical analysis were used to examine data: descriptive statistics (frequencies, averages), Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney criteria, and Spearman's correlation.

Results of empirical research

The analysis of results of the students' opinion on the *assessment of the quality of studies* revealed that about half of the respondents (47.30%) assessed the study quality with 4 points, while about a third of them (30.50%) with 5 points (Figure 1).

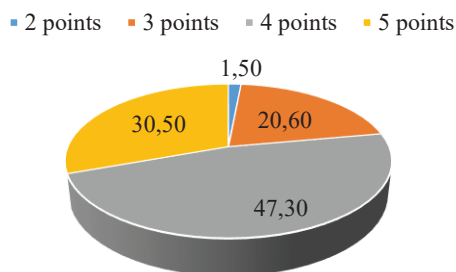


Figure 1. Respondents' opinion on the quality of studies (%)

The assessment of the connections between the learning provisions and study quality of the Klaipėda University *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme students revealed a tendency that the majority of respondents choose the deep learning motive: 91.60% (Figure 2).

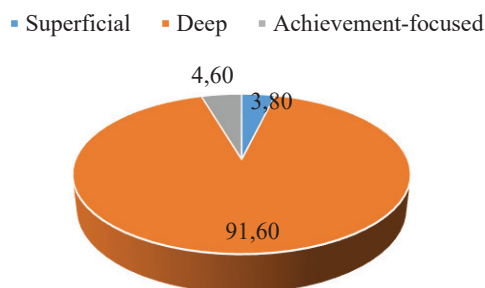


Figure 2. Respondents' choice of learning motives (%)

The Mann-Whitney criterion was applied to identify differences in the responses of the two groups according to the nature of funding, i.e. self-funded studies and state-funded studies, to the statements about the assessment of the quality of studies. The analysis of data shows that those, who pay for their studies are more likely to agree that student motivation is an important factor of the quality of studies ($U = 1653.0$; $p = 0.042$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in the responses of students to the assessment of the study quality factors according to the nature of funding

Study quality factors	Nature of funding	Rank averages	<i>P</i>	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>
Structure of the study programme	Self-funded	64.68	0.955	2019.5
	State-funded	64.35		
Curriculum of the study subject	Self-funded	62.17	0.462	1895.0
	State-funded	66.43		
Teaching methods	Self-funded	60.84	0.265	1818.0
	State-funded	67.53		
Individual work tasks	Self-funded	63.10	0.663	1949.0
	State-funded	65.66		
Methods of reporting for individual work tasks	Self-funded	65.25	0.818	1986.5
	State-funded	63.88		
University teacher competences	Self-funded	58.84	0.061	1701.5
	State-funded	69.19		
Student motivation	Self-funded	58.00	0.042	1653.0
	State-funded	69.89		
Interpersonal relationships with university teachers	Self-funded	58.99	0.087	1710.5
	State-funded	69.06		
Interpersonal relationships with classmates	Self-funded	61.40	0.353	1850.0
	State-funded	67.07		
Material base (library, data bases, hardware, etc.)	Self-funded	59.51	0.133	1740.5
	State-funded	68.64		
Provision of information about the organization of the study process	Self-funded	59.63	0.135	1747.5
	State-funded	68.54		

In order to identify differences in the responses of students concerning the assessment of study quality factors in terms of the cycle of studies, the Mann-Whitney criterion was applied. The analysis of data revealed statistically significant differences in the assessment of *methods of reporting for individual work tasks* ($U = 1221.0$; $p = 0.013$) and *provision of information about the organization of the study process* ($U = 1218.0$; $p = 0.013$) (Table 3). *Methods of reporting for individual work tasks* (rank averages of Master students – 74.68, rank averages of Bachelor students – 62.96) and *provision of information about the organization of the study process* (rank averages of Master students – 78.68, rank averages of Bachelor students – 61.56) are more important for the students of the Master’s study programme than for those of the Bachelor’s.

Table 3. Differences in the responses of students to the assessment of the study quality factors according to the cycle of studies

Study quality factors	Cycle of study	Rank averages	<i>P</i>	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>
Structure of the study programme	Bachelor	62.96	0.081	1354.0
	Master	74.68		
Curriculum of the study subject	Bachelor	64.55	0.402	1508.5
	Master	70.13		
Teaching methods	Bachelor	65.12	0.621	1563.5
	Master	68.51		
Individual work tasks	Bachelor	64.23	0.313	1477.5
	Master	71.04		
Methods of reporting for individual work tasks	Bachelor	61.59	0.013	1221.0
	Master	78.59		
University teacher competences	Bachelor	65.13	0.599	1565.0
	Master	68.47		

Study quality factors	Cycle of study	Rank averages	<i>P</i>	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>
Student motivation	Bachelor	66.19	0.913	1630.5
	Master	65.46		
Interpersonal relationships with university teachers	Bachelor	63.29	0.123	1386.0
	Master	73.74		
Interpersonal relationships with classmates	Bachelor	64.74	0.490	1527.0
	Master	69.59		
Material base (library, data bases, hardware, etc.)	Bachelor	63.59	0.183	1415.0
	Master	72.88		
Provision of information about the organization of the study process	Bachelor	61.56	0.013	1218.0
	Master	78.68		

The Kruskal-Wallis criterion was applied in order to analyse the responses of the three groups of respondents according to the mode of studies concerning the assessment of the study quality. The obtained data (Table 4) show that the differences between students of different modes of studies are statistically significant ($p = 0.025$). Having observed rank averages, it becomes clear that rank averages of full-time and part-time studies are lower, while rank averages of the full-time session-based mode of studies are higher. It can be concluded that students of the full-time session-based mode of studies assess the quality of studies higher than the students of the full-time or part-time mode of studies.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents' attitudes towards the assessment of study quality according to the mode of studies

	X^2	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i> (Sig.)	Mode of study	Rank averages
Study quality assessment	7.339	2	0.025	Full-time studies	50.07
				Part-time studies	69.55
				Full-time session-based studies	70.65

The Kruskal-Wallis criterion was applied to analyse the responses of students from three age groups of respondents to the assessment of study quality. The obtained data (Table 5) show that the difference between the age groups of students is statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). Having observed rank averages, it can be seen that rank averages of the 18–23 y.o. and 24–34 y.o. age groups are lower, while those of 35–58 y.o. age group are higher. It can be concluded that older students (35–58 y.o. age groups) assess the quality of studies higher than the younger ones (18–23 y.o. and 24–34 y.o.).

Table 5. Distribution of respondents' attitudes towards the assessment of study quality by age groups

	X^2	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i> (Sig.)	Age group	Rank averages
Study quality assessment	11.652	2	0,003	18–23 y.o.	54.16
				24–34 y.o.	60.71
				35–58 y.o.	79.38

The Spearman's correlation coefficient allowed to determine the positive statistically significant connections between the study quality factors (Table 6). The values of the correlation coefficient are interpreted on the basis of the methodology of Rupšienė, Rutkienė (2016). Low correlation and weak relationship is determined when the value of the correlation coefficient is 0.20–0.40. Moderate correlation and strong relationship is determined when the value of the correlation is 0.40–0.70. Statistically significant relationships between the study quality factors, for which moderate correlation and strong relationship were determined are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Connection between the study quality factors

Factors	Curriculum of the study subject	Teaching methods	Individual work tasks	University teacher competences	Student motivation	Interpersonal relationships with university teachers	Provision of information about the organization of the study process
Structure of the study programme	$r = 0.542$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.435$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.305$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.327$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.287$ $p = 0.001$	$r = 0.328$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.362$ $p = 0.000$
Curriculum of the study subject	-	$r = 0.435$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.358$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.416$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.432$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.335$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.303$ $p = 0.000$
Teaching methods	-	-	$r = 0.359$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.511$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.375$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.469$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.277$ $p = 0.001$
University teacher competences	-	-	$r = 0.280$ $p = 0.001$	-	$r = 0.501$ $p = 0.000$	$r = 0.514$ $p = 0.000$	-
Student motivation	-	-	$r = 0.258$ $p = 0.003$	-	-	$r = 0.620$ $p = 0.000$	-

The Spearman's correlation coefficient allowed to determine moderate correlation and strong relationship between several statements: moderate ($r = 0.620$) statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) was determined between *student motivation* and *interpersonal relationships with university teachers*; and moderate ($r = 0.542$) statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) was determined between *structure of the study programme* and *curriculum of the study subject*. The following tendency shows that for students, who find student motivation to be important, interpersonal relationships with university teachers are also important. There is also a connection between the structure of the study programme and the curriculum of the study subjects. For students, for whom *university teacher competences* are important, *interpersonal relationships with university teachers* are also important ($r = 0.514$; $p = 0.000$). Moderate ($r = 0.511$) statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) was also determined between students, who selected *teaching methods*, as well as *university teacher competences* as important study quality factors.

Conclusions

1. Works of researchers and education documents note the importance of the involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education. Students' needs, expectations and priorities of study factors are important for the assessment of the quality of the KU *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme. Results of the empirical research revealed that students assess the quality of the *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme with higher rather than moderate or low scores: about half of the respondents assessed it with 4 points, and about a third – with 5 points. Students of the full-time session-based mode of studies assessed the quality of the study programme higher than those of the full-time or part-time modes of studies. A clear tendency became evident that older students (35–58 y.o. age group) assessed the study quality higher than younger ones (18–23 y.o. and 24–34 y.o.).

2. Most students choose the deep learning motive, which highlights the mature attitude of students towards their studies and the development of competences. The research revealed the exceptional attitude of students of *Childhood Pedagogy* study programme to some of the factors that determine the quality of studies. Students, who pay for their studies themselves were more likely to agree that student motivation is an important study quality factor, compared to those students, whose studies are state-funded. Methods of reporting for individual work tasks and provision of information about the organization of the study process are more important for the students of the Master's study programme than for those of the Bachelor's study programme. There is a tendency that for those students, for whom the factor of *student motivation* is impor-

tant, *interpersonal relationships with university teachers* are also important. There is also a moderate and statistically significant relationship between the *structure of the study programme* and the *curriculum of the study subject*, between the *university teacher competences* and *interpersonal relationships with university teachers*, as well as between *teaching methods* and *university teacher competences*. The limitations of the questionnaire revealed during the research require corrections and new, more detailed researches. It is also require for comprehensive study of students deep learning, linking it to the quality of studies and comparing it with the results of other studies.

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KLAIPĖDOS UNIVERSITETO VAIKYSTĖS PEDAGOGIKOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS STUDENTŲ MOKYMO SI NUOSTATŲ IR STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS ŠĄSAJOS

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Santrauka

Aukštasis mokslas, mokslinė veikla ir inovacijos atlieka svarbią funkciją palaikant socialinę sanglaudą, ekonomikos augimą ir pasaulinį konkurencingumą. Visuomenės globalizacijos, mokslo ir darbo rinkos virsmo kontekste išryškėja aukštojo mokslo paradigmos kaitos priežastis – siekis parengti studentą, kad jis kuo geriau atliktų savo vaidmenį visuomenėje, patenkintų savo ir darbdavių lūkesčius. Tad vienas esminių Klaipėdos universiteto keliamų uždavinių – tobulinti rengiamų specialistų studijų kokybę. Kintant aukštojo mokslo paradigmai ne tik Lietuvoje, bet ir visoje Europoje ypač aktualios tampa į studentą orientuotos studijos. Bolonijos proceso dokumentuose pažymima studentų dalyvavimo svarba užtikrinant aukštojo mokslo kokybę.

Keliamas tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti KU Vaikystės pedagogikos studijų programos studentų mokymosi nuostatų ir studijų kokybės sąsajas. Tikslui realizuoti anketinės apklausos būdu apklausti 131 Klaipėdos universiteto Vaikystės pedagogikos studijų programos studentas. Duomenys analizuoti SPSS programa (24 versija). Analizuojant duomenis taikyti šie statistinės analizės metodai: aprašomoji statistika (dažniai, vidurkiai), Kruskal’io-Wallis’o, Mann’o-Whitney’aus kriterijai ir Spearman’o koreliacija.

Empirinio tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad Vaikystės pedagogikos studijų programos kokybę studentai vertino labiau aukštais nei vidutiniais ar žemais balais: maždaug pusė apklaustųjų ją įvertino 4 balais, maž-

daug trečdalis – 5 balais. Nuolatinė – sesijinių studijų formos studentai aukščiau vertino studijų programos kokybę, palyginus su nuolatine ar išėstine forma studijuojančiais studentais. Išryškėjo tendencija, kad vyresni (35–58 m. amžiaus grupės) studentai aukščiau vertino studijų kokybę nei jaunesni (18–23 m. ir 24–34 m.).

Daugelis studentų renkasi giluminį mokymosi motyvą, tai atskleidžia brandų studentų požiūrį į studijas ir kompetencijų ugdymąsi. Patys už studijas mokantys studentai buvo linkę pritarti, kad studento motyvacija yra svarbus studijų kokybės veiksnys, palyginus su studentais, kurių studijas finansuoja valstybė. Magistrantūros studijų programos studentams svarbesni savarankiško darbo užduočių atsiskaitymo būdai ir informacijos apie studijų proceso organizavimą pateikimas nei bakalauro studentams. Nustatyta tendencija, kad studentams, kuriems svarbus *studento motyvacijos* veiksnys, yra svarbūs ir *tarpusavio santykiai su dėstytojais*. Be to, pastebėtas vidutinis ir statistiškai reikšmingas ryšys tarp *studijų programos sandaros ir dalyko turinio*, tarp *dėstytojo kompetencijos* ir *tarpusavio santykių su dėstytojais* bei tarp taikomų *dėstytojo metodų* ir *dėstytojo kompetencijos*.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *studentai, mokymosi nuostatos, studijų kokybė, sąsajos, studijų programa.*

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