

Original article

The pedagogical professionalization of Higher Education teachers: Trends in postgraduate professional development to improve educational quality in Latin America



**La profesionalización pedagógica del docente de educación superior:
tendencias en la superación postgraduada para mejorar la calidad
educativa en América Latina**

**A profissionalização pedagógica do docente do Ensino Superior
Tendências na formação pós-graduada para melhorar a qualidade
educativa na América Latina**

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Received: 5/05/2026

Accepted: 9/06/2026

ABSTRACT

The pedagogical professionalization of higher education faculty in Latin America faces the challenge of moving beyond approaches focused solely on disciplinary or technological updating, toward

integrating didactic, reflective, and research-oriented training that meaningfully impacts educational quality. This study analyzes recent trends in postgraduate professional development aimed at the pedagogical professionalization of higher education faculty and their contributions to improving educational quality in Latin America. A qualitative literature review of publications from 2020 to 2025 was conducted using Google Scholar, and a thematic analysis was performed on 14 selected sources in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Results indicate trends including a shift from instrumental training to comprehensive professional training; recognition of postgraduate development as a sustained process; construction of pedagogical identity through reflection and research on practice; and alignment of pedagogical training with student - centered teaching. Pedagogical professionalization therefore requires continuous, institutionally supported training processes that integrate didactic knowledge, critical reflection, and practice - based research to make a genuine contribution to the quality of university education.

Keywords: pedagogical professionalization; postgraduate professional development; educational quality; teacher identity; higher education; Latin America.

RESUMEN

La profesionalización pedagógica del docente de educación superior en América Latina enfrenta el desafío de superar enfoques centrados solo en la actualización disciplinar o tecnológica, para integrar una formación didáctica, reflexiva e investigativa que impacte la calidad educativa. En este sentido, se propone analizar las tendencias recientes en la superación postgraduada orientada a la profesionalización pedagógica del docente de educación superior y sus aportes a la mejora de la calidad educativa en América Latina. Para ello se ejecutó una revisión cualitativa de literatura publicada entre 2020 y 2025, con búsqueda en Google Académico y análisis temático de 14 fuentes seleccionadas en inglés, español y portugués. Los resultados muestran que las tendencias identificadas se relacionaron con el tránsito de la capacitación instrumental a la formación integral, la valoración de la superación postgraduada como proceso sostenido, la construcción de identidad pedagógica mediante reflexión e investigación sobre la práctica y la vinculación de la formación pedagógica con la enseñanza centrada en el estudiante. En este sentido, la profesionalización pedagógica requiere procesos formativos continuos, institucionalmente respaldados, que integren

saber didáctico, reflexión crítica e investigación de la práctica para aportar genuinamente a la calidad educativa universitaria.

Palabras clave: profesionalización pedagógica; superación postgraduada; calidad educativa; identidad docente; educación superior; Latinoamérica.

RESUMO

A profissionalização pedagógica do docente do ensino superior na América Latina enfrenta o desafio de superar abordagens centradas apenas na atualização disciplinar ou tecnológica, para integrar uma formação didática, reflexiva e investigativa que impacte a qualidade educativa. Nesse sentido, propõe-se analisar as tendências recentes na formação pós-graduada voltada à profissionalização pedagógica do docente do ensino superior e suas contribuições para a melhoria da qualidade educativa na América Latina. Para isso, realizou-se uma revisão qualitativa da literatura publicada entre 2020 e 2025, com busca no Google Acadêmico e análise temática de 14 fontes selecionadas em inglês, espanhol e português. Os resultados mostram que as tendências identificadas se relacionaram com a transição da capacitação instrumental para a formação integral, a valorização da formação pós-graduada como processo contínuo, a construção da identidade pedagógica por meio da reflexão e investigação sobre a prática, e a articulação da formação pedagógica com o ensino centrado no estudante. Desse modo, a profissionalização pedagógica requer processos formativos contínuos, institucionalmente apoiados, que integrem saber didático, reflexão crítica e investigação da prática para contribuir genuinamente com a qualidade educativa universitária.

Palavras-chave: profissionalização pedagógica; formação pós-graduada; qualidade educativa; identidade docente; ensino superior; América Latina.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Latin America, in the words of Cerdá Suárez *et al.* (2021), faces increasing demands related to academic quality, digital transformation, student diversity, and the social relevance of its programs. It is precisely in this context that university professors occupy a central position, since, in the words of Kunts (2025), their work also involves designing learning experiences,

guiding educational pathways, evaluating processes, and responding within complex institutional contexts.

As can be seen in the work of Vega-Huerta *et al.* (2025), continuing professional development for university faculty has received greater attention in recent years in institutional policies and educational literature. What is striking is that, according to Smith and Wyness (2025), a significant portion of these initiatives have focused on disciplinary updates, the use of technology, or compliance with administrative requirements. Thus, while these dimensions are acknowledged as necessary, we subscribe to Abdulrahim's (2024) that they are insufficient if not integrated with pedagogical training that strengthens faculty identity, reflection on practice, and the ability to investigate real-world problems in university teaching.

In this sense, it becomes evident how pedagogical professionalization gains relevance, since it allows us to understand university teaching as an academic practice with its own knowledge, methods, and responsibilities (Kariyev *et al.*, 2023; Ndebele, 2024). This perspective requires moving beyond the idea that expert mastery of a discipline alone guarantees quality teaching (Huamán-Romaní *et al.*, 2022; Pakhomov *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, conceiving of pedagogical professionalization as a process that transcends the preparation and transmission of knowledge entails, in the words of Mitre Cotta *et al.* (2024) and Srinivasa *et al.* (2023), recognize that educational improvement requires sustained training processes, institutionally supported and linked to the specific needs of teachers and students.

Thus, in Latin America, Ainscow *et al.* (2025) and Villegas-Reimers *et al.* (2023) agree that this debate is especially important due to the existing gaps between demands for quality education and the actual conditions for teacher professional development. Furthermore, as Zhao *et al.* point out... (2024), postgraduate professional development can be a relevant way to address these tensions, provided it is not limited to fragmented courses or isolated certifications. Therefore, in line with Hashim (2022) and Zamazii (2024), it is agreed that its value depends on the capacity to integrate pedagogical training, critical reflection, research on practice, and the building of academic communities. Thus, within this context, this article aimed to analyze recent trends in postgraduate professional development focused on the pedagogical professionalization of higher education teachers, with an emphasis on its contributions to improving the quality of education in Latin America.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

This study was conceived as a qualitative literature review, following the guidelines of Wilson and Anagnostopoulos (2021), specifically aimed at identifying recent trends in the pedagogical professionalization of higher education faculty and its relationship to postgraduate training, pedagogical identity, the improvement of teaching practice, and educational quality in Latin America. The objective was to analyze research published between 2020 and 2025 that would allow us to understand how the continuing education of university faculty has incorporated, or relegated to a secondary position, the pedagogical dimension in favor of disciplinary and technological updating.

Information search strategy

The document search was conducted using Google Scholar, due to its ability to retrieve indexed scientific literature and other academic documents linked to internationally circulated journals. To improve traceability, the retrieved references were managed in Zotero, where folders were organized by year, language, topic, and index. Articles published in journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese (in that order of preference), were prioritized, provided they explicitly addressed the pedagogical training of university faculty, professional development, pedagogical identity, reflection on practice, or educational quality in higher education.

The search strategy combined descriptors in the three planned languages.

- In Spanish, combinations of the following key terms were used: profesionalización pedagógica docente universitario, formación continua profesorado universitario, superación postgraduada docente educación superior, identidad pedagógica docente universitario e investigación sobre la práctica docente universitaria.
- In English, combinations of the following key terms were used: university teacher professional development, pedagogical professionalization in higher education, faculty development pedagogical identity, teaching practice inquiry higher education and postgraduate teacher training higher education.

- In Portuguese, combinations of the following key terms were used: *formação pedagógica*, *docent universitário*, *desenvolvimento profissional*, *docent ensino superior* and *identitye pedagógica professor universitário*.

Criteria for the selection of studies

Peer-reviewed publications, edited between 2020 and 2025, were included if they were directly relevant to the research problem and had a DOI, stable URL, or verifiable metadata. Theses, non-peer-reviewed papers, institutional documents not published in scientific journals, duplicate texts, works focused exclusively on technological training without relation to the pedagogical dimension, and studies on teacher training at educational levels other than higher education were excluded, unless they contributed categories transferable to the analysis.

The selection process unfolded in four stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to discard documents unrelated to the research topic. Next, thematic alignment with the defined areas of analysis (continuing education, pedagogical identity, practice research, postgraduate professional development, and educational quality) was verified. Third, the full text of the shortlisted works was examined. Finally, 14 sources of particular relevance were selected for in-depth analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Matrix of analysis of the sources included in the study

Authors	Year	Journal	Topics covered	Main results
Fernandes, Araújo, Miguel and Abelha	2023	Education Sciences	Pedagogical training, professional development of teachers, change in conceptions and practices.	It shows that teacher training influences teachers' conceptions, practices, and experiences. It should create spaces for reflection on curriculum and pedagogical decisions, going beyond simply equipping teachers with teaching techniques.

Smith and Wyness	2024	Professional Development in Education	Effectiveness of university teaching professional development.	It points out that the programs are diverse in composition, design and purpose, which allows for discussion of the absence of homogeneous models of pedagogical professionalization.
Murtonen, Aldahdouh, Vilppu, Trang, Riekkien, Vermunt	2024	Teacher Development	Teacher learning, self-regulation, and student-centered teaching.	It links pedagogical training, self-regulation, and teacher learning patterns with the move towards student-centered approaches.
Belisle, Jean and Fernandez	2024	Frontiers in Education	Scope review on educational development of university faculty.	It identifies definitions, purposes, factors and variables of the educational development of university faculty, which provides a broad conceptual basis.
Veiga, Sanches and Alves	2025	Sisyphus-Journal of Education	Effects of pedagogical training on teaching, learning and professional identity.	It states that pedagogical training strengthens teacher quality, understanding of the teaching-learning process, and professional identity.
Alves and Gonçalves	2024	Portuguese Education Magazine	Building university teaching as an academic profession.	It allows us to argue that university teaching requires specific pedagogical training, not just disciplinary mastery.
Costa Xavier, da Cunha, Del Roveri,	2024	Education	Research on one's own practice, teaching	It argues that training transforms pedagogical practice through the

Pamplona da Silva y Sancinetti			professionalism, and pedagogical training.	reinterpretation of teaching decisions and the affirmation of professionalism.
El-Soussi	2025	International Journal of Educational Research Open	Teacher identity, digital transition and changes in beliefs, roles and practices.	It shows that technological changes affect teacher identity and generate tensions between adaptation, resistance, and ambivalence.
Alvarez-Huari	2025	Technological-Educational Journal Teachers 2.0	Digital competence, continuous training and hybrid models.	It points out that digital competence includes knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices, and requires institutional commitment to continuous training.
Condor Campos	2025	InveCom Magazine	Educational quality, didactic research and university teaching.	It argues that university teaching should be strengthened through didactic research and ongoing reflection.
Zapata Tapias and Agudelo Torres	2025	Virtual Journal of the Catholic University of the North	University teaching and reinterpretation of practices.	It addresses university teaching as a field associated with teaching practice and the professional training demanded by society.
Rodríguez Partidas, Pirona, Giménez Guariguata, González Cruz	2025	Uniandes Episteme. Digital Journal of Science, Technology and Innovation	University research, reflection and pedagogical innovation.	It highlights the need to integrate research and pedagogical practice to improve university education.

Londoño Orozco and Sanabria Totaitive	2025	The USB Agora	Challenges in the training of university teachers.	It contextualizes the contemporary demands of Higher Education and their effects on teacher training.
Almeida and Viana	2025	Portuguese- speaking Education Magazine	Institutional policies and practices for teacher professional development.	It maps policies and practices of Portuguese public universities, useful for comparing institutional initiatives for postgraduate improvement.

Source: Own elaboration

Procedures for information analysis

The analysis of the information followed a qualitative, thematic approach, so the interpretation focused on recognizing convergences, tensions, and gaps in recent literature (Furlong & Lester, 2023). In particular, it examined whether the continuing education of university faculty is oriented toward comprehensive pedagogical professionalization or whether it maintains an instrumental tendency centered on technological skills, disciplinary updating, and institutional compliance.

Furthermore, as a criterion for rigor, thematic triangulation was applied among studies from different countries, languages, and methodological approaches. Simultaneously, the currency of the sources, the editorial quality of the journals, the clarity of each study's methodological design, and its direct contribution to the research problem were considered. The main limitation of the procedure lay in the use of Google Scholar as the initial retrieval source, due to the breadth and heterogeneity of its results. To mitigate this risk, each document was verified on the journal's website, in Scopus, Web of Science, or in reliable editorial records when available.

RESULTS

Recent trends in the pedagogical professionalization of university teachers

Document analysis demonstrated that the professional development of university faculty has begun to be defined as a broader process than disciplinary updating. In the studies analyzed, the training of higher education faculty appeared linked to the understanding of teaching, didactic decision-making, reflection on practice, and the construction of a teaching identity. Along these lines, Fernandes *et al.* (2023) indicated that pedagogical training influenced how teachers interpreted their teaching performance and valued student learning.

A primary trend identified was the shift from an instrumental view of training to a broader, more comprehensive, formative conception (Figure 1). Smith and Wyness (2025) argued that professional development programs for faculty were more effective when they aligned institutional goals, faculty needs, and observable effects in practice. This finding allowed for a distinction between isolated professional development activities and sustained training processes capable of influencing university pedagogical culture.

Dimensión	Visión Instrumental (Capacitación)	Concepción Formativa (Profesionalización)
Propósito	Transmisión de información y actualización técnica	Transformación de la comprensión del oficio docente
Frecuencia	Actividades aisladas y cursos breves desconectados	Trayectos continuos y procesos de formación sostenidos
Foco	El contenido disciplinar y los recursos	Las necesidades del profesorado, el contexto y los propósitos institucionales
Resultado	Suma de credenciales y certificaciones	Capacidad para incidir en la cultura pedagógica universitaria

Figure 1. Comparative analysis between instrumental and formative dimensions

Source: Own elaboration

Another relevant trend was the broadening of the concept of teacher educational development. In this regard, Bélisle *et al.* (2024) showed that this field encompasses personal, professional, institutional, and curricular dimensions (Figure 2). Accordingly, pedagogical professionalization also involved revising conceptions of knowledge, the student, assessment, and the role of the university. University teaching thus emerged as a professional practice with its own body of knowledge, situated between disciplinary expertise and formative responsibility.



Figure 2. Main dimensions of teacher educational development

Source: Own elaboration

The studies also suggested that teacher training gained meaning when it fostered processes of self-regulation and teacher reflection. In this regard, Murtonen *et al.* (2024) linked the quality of teacher learning to student-centered teaching approaches. This allowed them to observe that disciplinary updating strengthens mastery of the field of knowledge; but pedagogical professionalization directs that knowledge towards relevant didactic decisions, formative assessment, and learning support.

In the case of Portuguese literature, Veiga *et al.* (2025) and Costa Xavier *et al.* (2024) agreed in recognizing pedagogical training as a way to consolidate the professional identity of university professors. This orientation proved significant, as it shifted the emphasis beyond specific training, orienting it towards understanding teaching as a practice that can be analyzed, documented, and

transformed. In particular, Costa Xavier *et al.* (2024) provided a reading close to the problem of this study, by linking professional development with research on one's own practice.

Based on this documentary analysis, the authors of this study agree that the reviewed sources revealed a common trend: pedagogical professionalization has been configured as a process of professional, reflective, and institutional development. While disciplinary and technological updates remain valuable in higher education, the analyzed studies indicated that these dimensions were insufficient when not integrated with pedagogical training, critical reflection, and teacher research. Thus, recent literature has placed the improvement of educational quality on a level that transcends the mere accumulation of courses and demands training processes capable of transforming the understanding of the teaching profession.

Postgraduate training as a path to professional teacher development

The reviewed literature revealed postgraduate professional development as an organized pathway to strengthen the professional growth of university faculty. In the studies analyzed, this training was presented as a process that can impact the quality of teaching when it addresses the faculty's real needs, aligns with institutional goals, and maintains continuity over time. Specifically, Smith and Wyness (2025) highlighted that professional development programs were most effective when they combined mentoring, reflection on practice, and coherence with the university context.

One visible trend was the need to move beyond the model of short, disconnected courses. In fact, Alvarez-Huari (2025) showed that continuing education gained greater value when designed as a learning pathway with defined objectives, follow-up, and opportunities to transfer learning to the classroom. From this perspective, postgraduate professional development served as a space to review teaching decisions, teaching challenges, assessment methods, and relationships with students.

Additionally, Murtonen *et al.* (2024) provided evidence on the importance of self-regulation in teacher learning. Their findings revealed that the effectiveness of training, in addition to depending on the program content itself, also depends on teachers' ability to analyze their own performance, recognize difficulties, and adjust their practices. This idea proved relevant, as it guides the differentiation between training focused on the transmission of information and training oriented toward professional development.

However, institutional initiatives also occupied an important place in the literature. In this regard, Almeida and Viana (2025) showed that professional development for teachers requires stable university policies, support structures, and recognition of teaching within the academic career. This contribution revealed that postgraduate professional development loses its impact when it is subject to individual efforts or scattered training opportunities. Conversely, it gains greater consistency when it is part of an institutional strategy for educational improvement.

In relation to the above, Fernandes *et al.* (2023) and Alves and Gonçalves (2024) demonstrated that teacher training programs can modify how teachers perceive teaching and their own role in the educational process. This transformation went beyond the acquisition of techniques; it stood out for its benefits in comparing experiences, discussing common problems, and reinterpreting practice. In this sense, postgraduate training was linked to a collective dimension of professional development because it allowed for the construction of shared pedagogical criteria within the academic community.

The reviewed studies also indicated that pedagogical relevance is a central condition of continuing education. A postgraduate professional development program is limited when it responds solely to administrative, technological, or regulatory demands (Zapata Tapias & Agudelo Torres, 2025). In contrast, it gains greater value when it addresses issues specific to university teaching, such as lesson planning, learning assessment, inclusion, academic support, research on practice, and student-centered teaching.

Based on the analysis of this thematic line, it is concluded that postgraduate professional development has been presented in the literature as a path to teacher professional development, provided it integrates continuity, pedagogical relevance, and institutional support (Figure 3). Therefore, the interpretation of these findings allows us to infer that continuing education can contribute to educational quality if it ceases to be understood as a sum of isolated activities and becomes a sustained process of reflection, professional learning, and transformation of university practice.

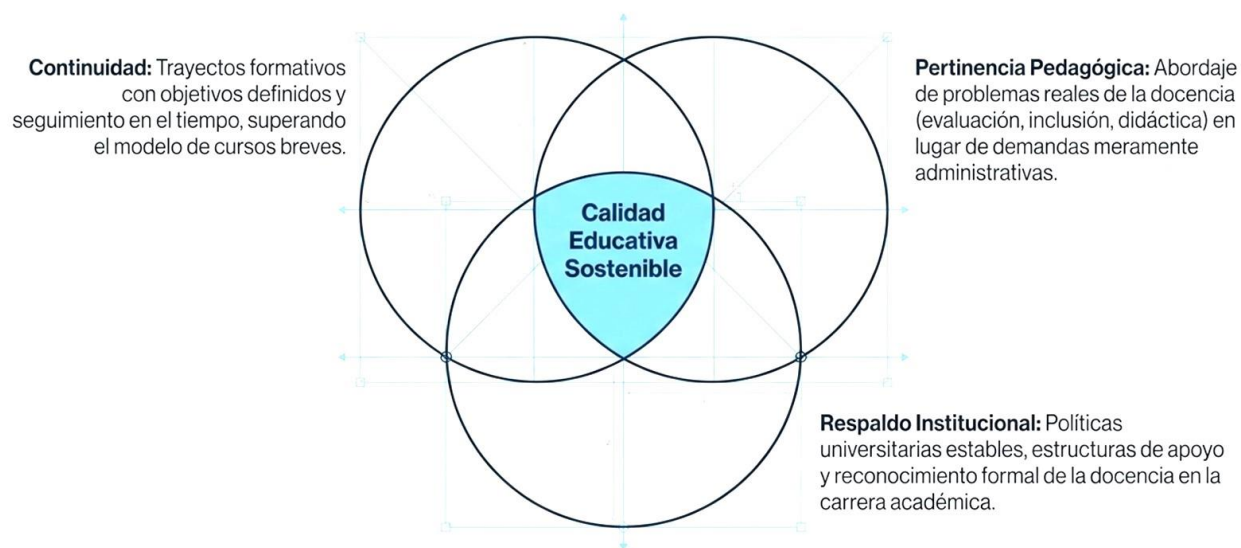


Figure 3. Conditions for the sustainability of educational quality in postgraduate training

Source: Own elaboration

Pedagogical identity, reflection and research on one's own practice

The documentary analysis of the consulted literature revealed that the professionalization of university professors did not depend solely on formal training programs. Rather, it was also related to how professors constructed a pedagogical identity, interpreted their experience, and transformed classroom problems into objects of systematic reflection. Therefore, teacher identity emerged as a situated dimension, constantly evolving, shaped by academic trajectories, institutional demands, and transformations in higher education.

In this context, Costa Xavier *et al.* (2024) offered a perspective closely aligned with this theme, demonstrating that self-reflection on teaching practice fostered professional review processes among university professors. Their findings indicated that analyzing pedagogical experience allowed for the identification of tensions, the reformulation of teaching decisions, and an understanding of teaching as a field open to inquiry. This approach proved relevant because it shifted the focus of professional development from the reception of content to the production of pedagogical knowledge based on practice.

For its part, systematic reflection also emerged as a component of pedagogical identity. Rodríguez Partidas *et al.* (2025) linked research and reflection to the improvement of university practice, highlighting that teachers need to critically interpret what happens in their classes to propose pedagogically sound adjustments. From this perspective, beyond simply offering opinions on teaching, the authors demonstrated that reflection focused primarily on examining evidence, comparing decisions, and recognizing how teaching actions affect student learning.

Following this line of thought, El-Soussi (2025) broadened the analysis to include the identity changes resulting from online teaching. According to this author, the digital transition (in addition to the modification of resources and work environments) produced shifts in how teachers understood their role, their pedagogical authority, and their relationship with students. This finding suggested that technological training, when separated from pedagogical identity, risks reducing teaching to a mere operational adaptation.

In the sources analyzed, pedagogical identity was configured as a professional construct that integrated disciplinary knowledge, teaching experience, ethical reflection, and an understanding of learning (El-Soussi, 2025; Rodríguez Partidas *et al.*, 2025; Costa Xavier *et al.*, 2024). This articulation allowed for a distinction between the university professor who transmits content and the teacher who designs learning experiences, interprets teaching problems, and makes decisions based on pedagogical criteria. Research on practice thus emerged as a way to strengthen this identity and to recognize university teaching as a field of knowledge production.

However, as Londoño Orozco and Sanabria Totaitive (2025) rightly point out, many academic careers in higher education are consolidated through disciplinary research, while the pedagogical dimension receives less institutional recognition. In the opinion of the authors of this study, this situation could explain why some continuing education programs focus on technical updates or responding to immediate demands, without fostering in-depth reflection on teaching. In response, the reviewed literature suggests that investigating one's own practice can lend academic legitimacy to teaching by linking experience, analysis, and educational improvement.

Therefore, this axis established that pedagogical identity is not formed spontaneously nor is it resolved through isolated courses (Figure 4). Its development requires spaces for reflection, academic communities, institutional support, and opportunities to study one's own practice. From this perspective, the pedagogical professionalization of university professors implies recognizing the

professor as a subject who learns, investigates, and transforms their teaching practice based on evidence, academic dialogue, and formative responsibility.



Figure 4. Analysis axes for the development of pedagogical identity

Source: Own elaboration

Pedagogical training, student-centered teaching, and educational quality

To develop this thematic line, the analysis began with the premise that the texts examined showed that the pedagogical training of university professors was related to educational quality when it influenced the organization of teaching and the way in which student learning was supported. Therefore, quality is linked to the institutional and faculty capacity to generate relevant, evaluable, and coherent learning experiences that meet students' needs.

It is precisely along this line of argument, Murtonen *et al.* (2024) contributed a relevant element by linking the quality of teacher learning with student-centered teaching. From this perspective, pedagogical training fostered changes in the way students plan, evaluate, and guide their participation. The emphasis shifted from the presentation of content to understanding how students learn, what support they require, and what teaching decisions strengthen their academic autonomy.

In line, Fernandes *et al.* (2023) also showed that teacher training can modify teachers' perceptions of their role. This finding revealed that improving teaching depends on revising the conceptions that underpin practice. When teachers understand teaching as a professional activity with its own body of knowledge, planning, assessment, and classroom interaction take on a more formative purpose.

Zapata Tapias and Agudelo Torres (2025) positioned university didactics as a component that allows for the reinterpretation of teaching practices. Their contribution proved useful in understanding that student-centered teaching requires well-founded pedagogical decisions, not simply methodological changes. Didactics, in this sense, acted as a bridge between disciplinary knowledge and the real conditions of learning, allowing the teacher to organize content, activities, and evaluation criteria with greater coherence (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Importance of university teaching methods to achieve autonomous learning

Source: Own elaboration

Studies on teachers' digital competence have added another dimension to the problem. In particular, Alvarez-Huari (2025) demonstrated that Latin American universities have placed increasing

importance on digital teacher training. However, this approach only acquires educational meaning when integrated with clear pedagogical goals. The use of technology in and of itself does not guarantee improved quality; its value depends on how it contributes to interaction, feedback, access to knowledge, and learning monitoring.

It is on this edge that Condor Campos *et al.* (2025) allowed these findings to be linked to a broader perspective on quality in higher education. These authors suggest that educational quality is strengthened when the university integrates teacher training, educational research, curriculum relevance, and the evaluation of educational processes. This integration prevents quality from being measured solely as external compliance and positions it as the result of sustained pedagogical practices.

The sources analyzed indicated that pedagogical training and disciplinary knowledge contribute to educational quality through didactics, by transforming the relationship between teaching and learning. A student-centered approach meant redefining the teacher's role as a mediator, designer of experiences, formative evaluator, and researcher of their own practice. From this perspective, pedagogical professionalization contributed to university quality by strengthening more conscious, contextualized teaching decisions linked to educational outcomes.

Tensions identified in recent literature

The review identified three tensions that ran through recent literature on the pedagogical professionalization of university faculty. The first was situated between technical and pedagogical training. Several studies acknowledged the value of disciplinary, methodological, and technological updates; however, they also showed that these components proved insufficient when not integrated with didactic reflection, learning assessment, and an understanding of the teaching role (Alvarez-Huari, 2025; Alves & Gonçalves, 2024; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023). In this sense, technical training provided tools, but pedagogical training offered criteria for deciding when, how, and for what purpose to use them.

The second tension emerged between episodic training and sustained professional development. It was identified that short, fragmented courses, or those disconnected from practice, have less capacity to transform university teaching. In contrast, programs with continuity, support, and connection to real classroom problems showed greater formative potential. This difference allowed

us to understand that postgraduate professional development cannot be limited to an accumulative offering of activities, as it requires training pathways with institutional and pedagogical meaning (Rodríguez Partidas *et al.*, 2025; Veiga *et al.*, 2025).

The third tension was related to technological updating and the construction of teacher identity. The sources analyzed showed that the digitization of higher education spurred new training demands; however, instrumental mastery of platforms and resources did not guarantee pedagogical improvement (Alvarez-Huari, 2025; El-Soussi, 2025). When technology was viewed as an end in itself, training tended to focus on procedures. When it was linked to pedagogical identity, it allowed for a re-evaluation of the teacher's role, interaction with students, and ways of supporting learning.

These tensions showed that the professional development of university professors takes place within a field of simultaneous demands (Figure 6). The university requires disciplinary updating, technological adaptation, research output, and educational quality; at the same time, teaching requires reflection, professional identity, and institutional recognition. Recent literature indicates that the challenge lies in integrating these demands into training processes that are consistent with the complexity of university teaching (Almeida & Viana, 2025; Zapata Tapias & Agudelo Torres, 2025).

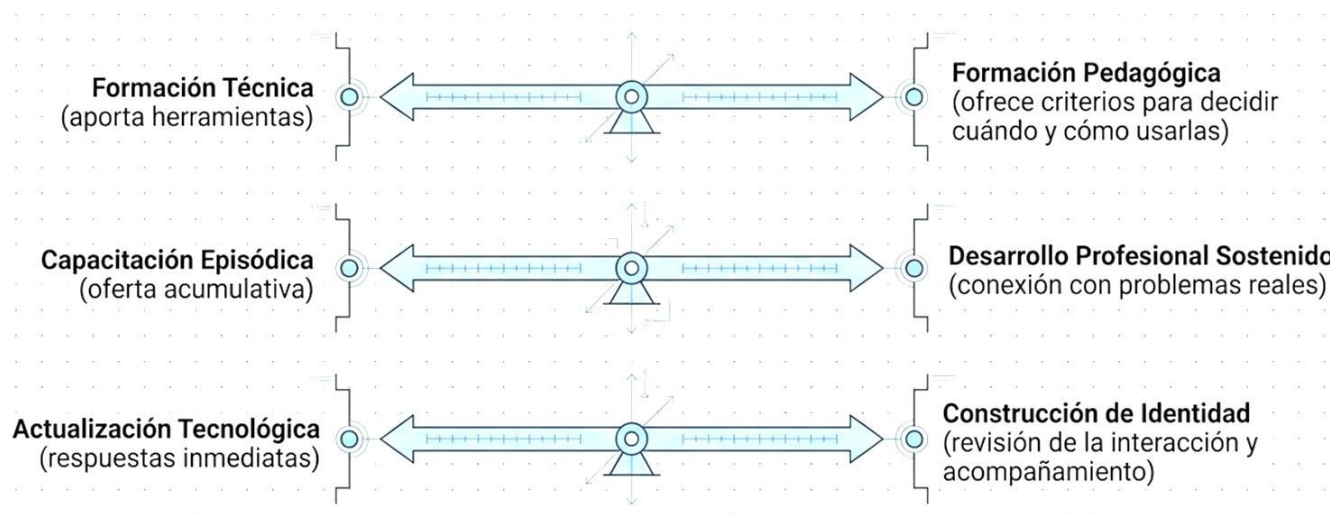


Figure 6. Main tensions identified in the literature

Source: Own elaboration

DISCUSSION

The findings of the review support what was stated by Sancar *et al.* (2021), insofar as the pedagogical professionalization of university professors requires a shift from a logic of ad hoc training to a conception of situated professional development. This argument coincides with Kim (2022), who maintains that professional development in higher education must address specific teaching needs and foster conditions to improve teaching and learning. From this perspective, training programs gain relevance when they are linked to real-world problems in academic practice (Mai Phuc, 2025).

This discussion also clarifies that teacher training has an identity component. Liang *et al.* (2023) show that the professional identity of university teacher educators is shaped by academic trajectories, institutional roles, and sub-identities linked to teaching. This contribution helps to interpret a tension observed in the results, which relates to the fact that university teaching continues to be subordinated, in some contexts, to research productivity or disciplinary mastery, even though it requires its own pedagogical knowledge (Moreira *et al.*, 2023).

Regarding student-centered teaching, the results are consistent with those nuanced by Bruna *et al.* (2023), who suggest that pedagogical training acquires value when it modifies the way in which the teacher organizes learning, supports participation, and evaluates progress. Along the same lines, and in accordance with what was reported in the present research, Adams *et al.* (2023) also identified a rise in student-centered approaches and didactic changes linked to practice. Therefore, pedagogical professionalization should no longer be conceived as a replacement for disciplinary knowledge, since this research demonstrates that it is articulated as an ability to transform that knowledge into meaningful learning experiences.

The technological dimension introduces an additional tension. Specifically, Ramírez Heredia *et al.* (2025) and Cabero-Almenara *et al.* (2023) indicate that the development of digital competencies in Latin American university professors depends on individual and institutional factors, including experience, university policies, infrastructure, educational management, and training. This finding qualifies the idea that digital competence depends solely on the professor's willingness. Improvement requires support, institutional conditions, and the pedagogical integration of technology.

University evaluation confirms this same concern. Viberg *et al.* (2024) analyzed the use of digital technologies in university assessment and highlighted the need to examine their incorporation into

training processes and their effects on teaching. This comparison reinforces that technology contributes to educational quality when it is linked to feedback, learning monitoring, and didactic decision-making, not when it is introduced as an operational response to digitization.

In light of this evidence, it can be stated that the professional development of higher education faculty is sustained by continuous training, faculty identity, reflection on practice, and institutional support. The results of this review align with recent literature by showing that educational quality does not depend solely on the individual performance of the professor. Indeed, one of the main contributions of this study is to demonstrate that such quality depends on university ecosystems capable of recognizing teaching as a specialized academic practice. This perspective opens a line of work for Latin America in the design of postgraduate professional development programs that integrate pedagogical training, research on teaching practice, digital competence with a pedagogical focus, and institutional policies for faculty recognition (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Strategic guidelines for achieving professionalization in Latin America

Source: Own elaboration

The review established that the professional development of higher education faculty cannot be reduced to disciplinary, technological, or regulatory updates. Its scope depends on training processes that integrate pedagogical knowledge, reflection on practice, teacher identity, and situated

pedagogical research. Thus, postgraduate professional development proved more relevant when conceived as a sustained professional development path, with institutional support and a direct connection to the real-world challenges of university teaching. Isolated training initiatives are insufficient to transform teaching practice and contribute to educational quality. Finally, recent literature suggests that improving the quality of higher education requires recognizing university teaching as a specialized academic practice. This implies strengthening institutional policies for pedagogical training, faculty support, formative assessment, and the development of academic communities focused on student learning.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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