

The Challenges Of Teaching In Higher Education Through A Literature Review

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Resumo:

This article discusses the main challenges faced by higher education teachers in an educational scenario marked by rapid political, social and technological transformations. Based on a literature review, the article seeks to understand how these changes impact pedagogical practices and demand teacher training that is more sensitive, critical and committed to social transformation. The article highlights the need to institutionalize continuing education policies, strengthen teaching skills and address the precarious working conditions that affect everyday university life. The article concludes that teacher development requires integrated actions that articulate theory, practice, ethical commitment and professional development within higher education institutions.

Palavras-chaves: University teaching, Teacher training, Higher education.

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I. Introduction

This article is a result of the Professional Graduate Program in Science and Mathematics Teaching, within the Research Line of Computational Technologies for Science and Mathematics Education.

In recent decades, teaching in higher education has undergone intense transformations in the educational landscape, driven by political, social, and technological demands. These changes challenge university professors to reframe their pedagogical practices and take on a critical role in a context marked by tensions between discourses on educational quality and institutional policies grounded in already-questioned paradigms. In this context, this article aims to discuss the main challenges of teaching in higher education, based on a literature review, in order to contribute to the construction of a more sensitive, participatory, and socially relevant teacher education.

Within this scenario, the legitimacy of creating institutional spaces that support university teacher training fostering a form of teaching committed to social transformation is growing. According to Sordi (2019), it is urgent to examine the real training needs of teachers, especially those at the beginning of their careers or newly hired by public institutions, so that they do not stray from the ethical and collective commitment to society. This training must go beyond technical mastery and also encompass the construction of pedagogical meaning that responds to the contemporary challenges of higher education.

In this process, as Masetto (2022) points out, the assessment of interactions between teachers and students both individually and in groups becomes essential for strengthening learning communities. When well evaluated and adjusted, collaborative pedagogical strategies can foster a more meaningful teaching experience and positively transform students' academic trajectories.

Furthermore, as Sampaio et al. (2023) argue, reflecting on the challenges of higher education teaching requires placing education within this broader political context, considering not only institutional demands but

also the historical commitments to the quality of teacher training. The fight for a more democratic and accessible higher education also depends on the valorization of the teaching profession and the implementation of pedagogical practices that integrate theory, experience, and social commitment.

II. Teacher Training And Development In Higher Education

The growing complexity of the educational landscape in higher education has intensified debates surrounding the training and professional development of university professors. In light of the contemporary demands of university teaching, it is essential not only to recognize but also to institutionalize mechanisms that support continuous pedagogical improvement. The establishment of dedicated units within higher education institutions focused on pedagogical training reflects this movement. These structures aim to identify training needs, promote development plans, and, in some cases, align their actions with educational research, thereby expanding their reach and relevance (ALMEIDA, 2020).

However, despite such initiatives, a gap persists between academic training and the pedagogical practice of university teachers. As noted by Vieira and Vieira (2023), academic production continues to be prioritized over teaching practices in most Brazilian institutions, contributing to ongoing shortcomings in pedagogical preparation. Even faculty members holding graduate degrees, such as a master's or doctorate, often lack sufficient preparation for the practical demands of teaching in the classroom, which directly impacts the quality of education provided.

In this context, the professionalization of teaching in higher education requires more robust and sustained institutional policies. Isolated actions, though valuable, are insufficient to address the complexity and continuity that teacher development demands. Salvador and Sordi (2024) emphasize the importance of ensuring time, space, and resources for training processes to occur continuously and in alignment with the real needs of both teachers and institutions. Thus, investing in pedagogical training ceases to be optional and becomes a structural condition for improving higher education.

III. Contemporary Demands And Competencies Of The University Professor

In Brazil, the debate on teacher education has been shaped by legal and curricular transformations aimed at meeting the multiple demands of society and schools as professional settings. Leite et al. (2018) highlight that recent updates in teacher training programs, driven by regulations and educational policies, reflect a legitimate concern with the quality of education and the adequate preparation of future teachers in light of new school realities.

However, this preparation cannot be limited to meeting legal guidelines. It must directly engage with the concrete needs of the educational context and promote the development of teaching competencies geared toward critical, reflective, and transformative pedagogical practice. Moura et al. (2021) reinforce this argument by discussing the importance of competencies in higher education, emphasizing that it is the teacher's role to ensure educational quality so that students are prepared to face the challenges of the job market. In this sense, the development of specific competencies becomes an essential bridge between academic knowledge and its social applicability.

Nevertheless, the overload of demands placed on university professors is not always accompanied by adequate working conditions or professional recognition. David (2016) problematizes this reality, stating that although increasing levels of qualification, innovation, and dedication are expected from educators, many of these demands are neither acknowledged nor financially compensated. This lack of recognition has negative effects on teachers' physical and mental health, which in turn compromises their pedagogical performance.

The use of digital technologies in teacher education holds great potential for transforming teaching practices and fostering continuous professional development. By integrating technological resources into training processes, it becomes possible to create more dynamic, collaborative environments that are better aligned with the demands of today's classrooms. Junger et al. (2023) emphasize that technology-mediated teacher training supports the construction of more contextualized knowledge, encouraging autonomy and critical reflection on educational practice. Additionally, Araújo and Junger (2024) highlight the importance of continuing education as a key strategy for professional development, arguing that only through ongoing training can educators keep pace with educational changes and meaningfully incorporate innovations into teaching.

Beyond teaching itself, higher education faculty members are expected to perform administrative tasks, meet with students and parents, plan activities, attend to classroom dynamics, and pursue continuous professional development—often funded out of their own pockets. This reveals a layering of roles that, as pointed out by David (2016), illustrates the precariousness of academic labor and the gap between institutional expectations and the real conditions under which professors work.

Given this scenario, initial teacher education, even when supported by progressive legal frameworks, has not been sufficient to prepare educators for the wide range of challenges they will face. Leite et al. (2018) stress the urgency of teacher education that is more closely aligned with the realities of schools and higher

education institutions. This demands more flexible curricula, more effective internship policies, and greater attention to the voices of pre-service teachers. Initial training, therefore, must be understood as a starting point rather than a final stage.

Furthermore, Moura et al. (2021) argue that students' perceptions of their teachers' competencies are a decisive factor in the success of the teaching-learning process. This places teachers in a position of constant evaluation by students, which, while positive in terms of formative feedback, can also intensify pressure—especially when structural and institutional conditions do not support quality teaching.

Thus, thinking about teacher development requires looking beyond technical skills or academic credentials. It involves considering the affective, ethical, political, and institutional dimensions of teaching. Universities must invest in policies that support, value, and listen to teachers, creating institutional spaces for continuing education and pedagogical dialogue as a way to mitigate professional burnout and strengthen teaching identity.

The studies by Leite et al. (2018), Moura et al. (2021), and David (2016) converge in showing that the challenges faced by higher education teachers demand more than training: they require recognition, institutional support, and public policies that guarantee decent working conditions. Only then will it be possible to build a critical, committed, and socially relevant teaching profession capable of responding to contemporary transformations with quality and responsibility.

IV. Working Conditions And Value Of The Teaching Career

Teaching in higher education, while marked by academic achievements and social recognition, is also characterized by numerous structural, political, and pedagogical challenges that directly impact the performance of professors. Lima, Silva, and Rodrigues (2018) clearly elucidate this scenario by highlighting the obstacles faced by university professors, ranging from the inadequacy of physical spaces and the lack of technological equipment to insufficient investment in research and the state's limited commitment to valuing public education.

In the pedagogical field, the challenges become even more evident. The authors draw attention to the phenomenon of "pedagogical loneliness," primarily experienced by early-career professors who often lack continuous formative spaces within their institutions. Additionally, the absence of public policies aimed at the specific training of higher education professors compromises the development of a critical and transformative pedagogical practice. In this context, teacher training remains secondary compared to the central focus on academic research.

This disproportionate emphasis on research, to the detriment of teaching, results in a distortion of the pedagogical role of university professors, negatively impacting both the quality of teaching and the recognition of teaching work. According to Lima, Silva, and Rodrigues (2018), there is also a lack of awareness among students about the formative nature of undergraduate education, revealing the need for a clearer articulation between theory, practice, and pedagogical intentionality in teacher training courses.

Ribeiro and Santos (2021), in turn, emphasize that teaching in higher education is a continuous process of constructing knowledge and practices, requiring professors not only technical knowledge but also didactic skills associated with a solid pedagogical foundation. According to the authors, the university educator finds themselves in a context marked by doubts and uncertainties, arising from constant changes in the field of knowledge and the new demands of contemporary society.

This instability challenges professors to stay constantly updated, simultaneously dealing with certainties based on professional experience and questioning the best paths for guiding the teaching and learning process. Therefore, this scenario calls for reflective, critical teaching practices that are open to dialogue with various bodies of knowledge, along with the institutional strengthening of permanent formative policies.

In light of this, there is an urgent need to restructure the formative logic in universities, valuing teaching and investing in public policies that recognize teaching as an essential dimension of higher education. For this to happen, university professors must have access to adequate working conditions, continuous training spaces, professional recognition, and institutional support—elements that are indispensable for confronting the contemporary challenges of educational practice.

V. Conclusion

Given the multiple contemporary demands, higher education teaching requires an urgent reconfiguration of its practices and foundational training. The educational reality presents challenges ranging from the lack of pedagogical preparation among teachers to the absence of adequate working conditions and institutional recognition. The role of the university professor, often marked by overload and isolation, requires more sensitive attention from institutions, especially concerning the creation of permanent spaces for continuous professional development.

Furthermore, it is necessary to break the logic that technical expertise and academic production are sufficient for the full exercise of university teaching. Pedagogical practice demands competencies that go

beyond disciplinary knowledge: it involves affective, ethical, and political dimensions that must be strengthened in training processes. The creation of public policies aimed at the training of university professors and the strengthening of learning communities are potential pathways toward a more humanized and transformative approach.

Therefore, thinking about higher education teaching means thinking about social commitment, listening, dialogue, and participation. Investing in the pedagogical training of teachers should not be seen as a one-time or optional action but as a structural strategy for improving education quality and valuing the professor as a fundamental agent of change. The development of a more critical and sensitive teaching practice must go hand in hand with the democratization of universities and the defense of truly public, accessible, and transformative higher education.

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