

## Article

# Transformation of Higher Education: Discussion of the Dimensions, Trends and Scenarios of Change in Ibero-America

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**Abstract:** World conferences on higher education have reported the effect of social changes on university systems. Particularly, changes that induce a transformation in the academic profession. Here, we study the paradigm shift of the profession in its dimensions, trends, and future scenarios. We conduct this study in two phases: first, we applied an inventory on the perception of university teaching to a sample of 2312 professors in the region; after that, we conducted a focus group for each of the ten dimensions in which we noticed indicators of change. With the quantitative data, we performed an ANOVA to identify three clusters of professionalization with dimensions open to change and related to each other: (1) Planning, Teaching Development, and Communicative Capacity; (2) Communication, Evaluation, and Self-evaluation; (3) Professional Self-evaluation, Teaching Innovation and Improvement and Individual Learning Support. With the focus groups we have identified the need to incorporate pedagogical models of inclusive education and teaching based on technological advances as the main drivers of change. We concluded with the proposal of four possible scenarios of future professionalism: (1) entrenched professionalism; (2) semi-professionalism; (3) fragmented professionalism; or (4) balanced professionalism.

**Keywords:** higher education; professionalization; paradigmatic changes; future scenarios



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## 1. Introduction

This study of the paradigmatic change in teaching professionalization in universities is based on three areas of political action and their corresponding theoretical foundations that account for the transformation of higher education institutions and the academic profession nowadays and that, in an integrated manner, constitute a new model or paradigm. These are as follows: (a) the effect of accreditation and evaluation policies based on standards; (b) the extension of the SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) movement; (c) the emergence of new regional spaces of higher education integration that shift the focus of transferability from teaching programs to learning outcomes, of which Europe and Latin America are two good examples.

Phenomena such as the growth or massification and democratization of higher education access are at the basis of the new role that universities play for developed societies [1,2]. In this new function, which is emerging as the present century progresses [3] in parallel to the onset and the apparent overcoming of a strong global economic crisis, the university no longer definitively possesses the monopoly of research. The academic body ceases to pivot in a balanced way between the traditional functions of research and teaching [4], to be fragmented into different ways of exercising the profession with different weights for the various functions: teaching, research, innovation, transfer, management and extension [5,6]. Both the loss of the monopoly of research and the need for alliances with the productive sector—as well as the transformation in the vision of training of professionals [7,8] the rise of privatization, and the emergence of new institutional formats of higher education—have generated the need to increase the processes of accountability to society. Therefore, the

need to implement accreditation and evaluation mechanisms based on standards [9–11] has also appeared. We have previously reported on some of these mechanisms [12].

Evaluation and quality assurance processes are never neutral but refer to power balances within universities and between them and other social actors [13]. There are three rationales that have been linked to institutional evaluation: accountability, compliance with requirements, and improvement. Through these rationales, a culture of quality is externally imposed in universities that tends towards excellence and moves internal processes [14]: (a) of resistance or bureaucratization; (b) of adjustment and implementation; (c) or of appropriation and improvement [15]. In this third case, the teaching action is modeled [16,17], strengthening the emergence of novel professional features and functions such as the following: teaching coordination, collection and analysis of information on the professional activity itself, monitoring of professional activity, and adaptation to stakeholders, mainly, to student satisfaction [18]. All this does not occur in a uniform manner in each institution concerned, but according to the stage of professional development of teachers, their expectations, their training, and their stage in life [19,20]. In Spain, the Acredita, Academia, and Docentia programs carried out by both Spanish Evaluation Agency (ANECA) and the other evaluation agencies recognized by The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQUA) are modeling teacher professionalization [21–24]. This is a reference for the application of evaluation policies that we have had the opportunity to know well, both as the evaluators and as the evaluated.

In any case, this new situation is not alien to the new international research agenda on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, which since the appearance of the Boyer Report of the Carnegie Foundation [25] in the framework of “the scholarship of teaching and learning SoTL”, has spread with the theoretical contributions of scholars [26]. It has spread through field work, such as that which we conducted at the University of Granada, from the opportunity for transformation of university teaching practice that the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) provided [27]. The declared aim of the SoTL movement in pursuit of academic knowledge of teaching and learning [28] is to make the process of facilitating learning at the university transparent. To achieve this purpose, the university faculty must be informed of the theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning in their own discipline and trained to collect rigorous evidence from their teaching practice [29]. This involves reflection, inquiry, evaluation, documentation, and communication [30]. The integration of research results in teaching, through innovative projects, is another component of this objective. This will gradually consolidate didactic knowledge specific to the various university disciplines [31]. The potential of this approach, in this regard, is just that it promotes a deep involvement with the discipline, in its practical dimension, leading to the convergence of research methods and teaching methods. The knowledge of the discipline is linked to didactic knowledge through Shulman’s already classic and powerful construct of “didactic knowledge of content” [32], which acquires a central place in this conjunction and which we must continue to support in higher education [33,34]. This is a theoretical reference that we have had the opportunity to develop with our empirical contributions.

The third approach acts as an antecedent of our project, based on the need to generate criteria for recognition, mobility, comparability, and transferability within integrated regional spaces of higher education [35]. This has shifted the focus of university education from teaching programs to learning outcomes [36]. This change, which has been brewing for more than a decade in Europe and is emerging in Latin America [37], has led to a transformation of classroom life. This transformation is evident in the way teaching guides are being developed, opting for active methodologies, transforming the organization of spaces, groups, and schedules, and applying new strategies for assessing outcomes [38]. The implementation of the EHEA has led to, for Spanish universities, an opportunity to implement new teaching methodologies that are transforming the teaching function in higher education [39]. We have pointed out three factors that come together in the implementation of the EHEA for didactic innovation [40]: (a) that there is strong pressure from outside

the university institutions themselves demanding change [41]; (b) that there are important clusters within the university institution, sensitive to the need for change [42]; (c) that there are known alternative didactic models towards which it is feasible to direct individual and institutional efforts for change [43]. In the last decade, these three factors have been present in Spanish universities and are emerging in Latin American universities. The advance of didactics and educational psychology has provided us with reliable knowledge of teaching and learning, already sufficiently contrasted through practical experiences, to safely abandon the traditional model of university education and enter into novel, innovative proposals, adapted to the new times [44]. All of this allows us to advance a teaching model that seeks excellence [45]. This is referent to a practical nature, to which we contribute with our professional action, our activity on educational innovation, and our reflection on teaching innovation.

### *Research Problem*

Thus, considering the three factors we have referred to, the problem we face is that the academic profession is evolving [46]. The professionalization of university teachers is changing [47]. Career milestones, training needs, and models of professional development at the university are evolving [48]. Training practices and interaction with basic and applied research are being transformed, and the mastery of new innovation, transfer, and management practices is demanded [49]. Additionally, new local, regional, and global scenarios are appearing, which correspond to new teaching professionalization practices that may be emerging and of which we still have incomplete knowledge. The lack of complete and deep knowledge prevents the development of professionalization policies that guide and facilitate the development of academic careers. That is the problem to which this study wants to respond. The research questions we intend to answer are as follows:

1. Where is the transformation of higher education taking place and what are the characteristics of this change that affect the global professionalization of teachers in Spain and Latin America?
2. Can we discuss, find, and characterize trends of change in systems and institutions that affect teacher professionalization?
3. What are the dimensions of teaching activity in higher education in which the paradigmatic change in professionalization can crystallize and how do they relate to each other?

The answer to these questions is organized in two phases. First, an inventory of perceptions on university teaching is applied with the aim of finding out how teaching is currently perceived in a wide sample of university professors. This inventory is structured in ten dimensions. Subsequently, ten focus groups are organized, one per dimension, to describe and discuss the trends of change in teaching as perceived by those involved.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1. Working Hypothesis and Objective*

If we know the conditions, characteristics, and the effect of the transformation of the teaching profession in higher education and its personal and contextual singularities, we will be able to make policies and design more effective professionalization agendas (including initial and continuous training and professional development strategies).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to learn about the trends of change in the teaching activity as perceived by the protagonists from the perspective of their effect on their own professionalization.

### *2.2. Procedure*

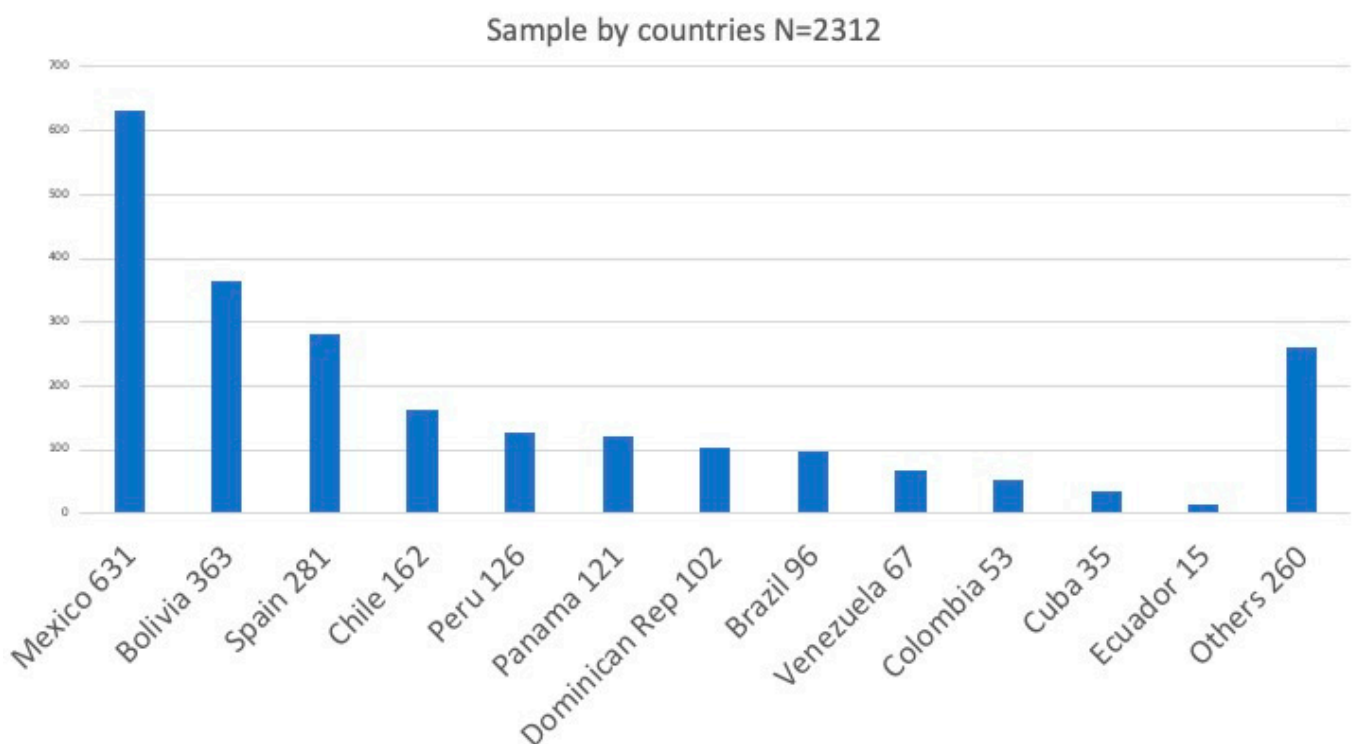
This study was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, with a descriptive and correlational character, an inventory of perceptions about university teaching was applied to a large sample of professors from universities in Spain and Latin America.

In the second part, with a comprehensive and qualitative character, a number of focus groups have been developed. One for each of the dimensions of teaching professionalization determined in the theoretical foundation.

### 2.3. Sample

#### 2.3.1. Sample of the Descriptive/Correlational Phase

The sample selected for convenience comprises 2312 subjects. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the sample by country. The sample can be characterized as follows: the participating subjects are mostly female, aged between 51 and 60 years, with 8 to 15 years of teaching seniority, with a permanent contract and full time, and are located in the field of social sciences.



**Figure 1.** Characterization of the sample.

#### 2.3.2. Participants in the Comprehensive/Qualitative Phase

A total of 5 Spanish universities and 21 Latin American universities participated in this study: 8 HEI from Mexico, 3 HEI from Brasil, 2 from Chile, 1 HEI from Perú, Panamá, Rep Dominicana, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, and Ecuador. Each university was represented by a group composed of one to five researchers who took part in the different phases of the project and in the focus groups presented in this text. A total of 62 teachers made up the focus groups. The participants were 41 women and 21 men, with an average age of 55 years and more than 10 years of seniority in higher education. A total of 20 of them, at the time of data collection, held relevant academic management positions in their universities.

### 2.4. Instruments

#### 2.4.1. Questionnaire of Perception of University Teaching Excellence

The inventory of perceptions about university teaching, to study teaching excellence, was developed and validated, analyzing its psychometric properties in the first [50] and successive applications. It was subsequently contextualized, translated into other languages, refined, and used to carry out different complementary studies in Spain, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, and Canada [51–56]. The questionnaire is available on the project web-

site. [https://profesiolab.ugr.es/seccion\\_libre/proyecto-profesup/](https://profesiolab.ugr.es/seccion_libre/proyecto-profesup/) (accessed on 1 September 2023).

The inventory contains 100 perceptions grouped into 10 dimensions that are answered on a 5-point Likert scale (not at all relevant, not very relevant, relevant, very relevant). The dimensions into which the instruments are structured are as follows: A. Vision of higher education teaching; B. Perception of students' educational needs; C. Knowledge of the context; D. Planning and organization of the subject; E. Development of teaching; F. Communicative capacity; G. Individual support for learning; H. Evaluation; I. Educational innovation and teaching improvement; J. Professional self-evaluation.

The results of the questionnaire application have been submitted to reliability, factorial, descriptive, correlational, and predictive analyses with the help of SPSS software [57,58].

#### 2.4.2. Focus Group Script

For each focus group, a motivational text for the discussion was drafted following a common structure or script. The organization of each focus group was carried out according to the following guidelines for energizing the discussion:

1. A 20 min oral presentation of the motivating text, by a rapporteur with the support of slides.
2. Launching to the group of the 3 or 4 questions that trigger discussion. The questions are included in the last slide.
3. Animation of interventions either for personal positioning with respect to the questions, or to relate institutional experiences, or to add theoretical elements on the dimension under discussion.
4. Emphasizing the identified trends of change. Discussing and refining them.
5. Final summary by the rapporteur.

The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. The qualitative information was analyzed using the "analytical induction" strategy, which was considered the most appropriate for examining the data in search of categories and possible relationships between them. The qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti (28.0) was used for coding. In our study, we sought to identify and contrast the perspectives and trends of change indicated by the participants of the group considered as a whole [50,59–61].

#### 2.5. Multidisciplinary Nature of the Study

The study we present is multidisciplinary, insofar as the results obtained and their possible application in teacher training policies in all academic disciplines are multidisciplinary. The foundation of the SoTL movement that we have outlined in the background involves the conception of the trainer's own professional identity and his or her task of teaching future professionals in different established scientific fields: Experimental Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences, Health Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Humanities and Arts. The researchers that make up the research network belong to the different fields of knowledge mentioned above. The expected results will be relevant for both the scientific and professional communities in the five fields.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Descriptive/Correlational Results: Self-Perception of Teacher Professionalization

The reliability analysis was carried out by calculating Cronbach's alpha, which gave a result of 0.976, which we consider excellent, and was corroborated by the test of two halves, obtaining a Guttman two halves coefficient of 0.916.

Table 1 shows the median of each of the dimensions, highlighting that the subjects hold an opinion of "relevant" in regards to dimensions B (Perception of students' educational needs), G (Individual support for learning) and J (Professional self-evaluation), and "very relevant" with dimensions A (Vision of higher education teaching), C (Knowledge of the context), D (Planning and organization of the subject), E (Development of teaching), F



(Communicative capacity), H (Evaluation), and I (Educational innovation and teaching improvement).

**Table 1.** Descriptive data of the dimensions.

Dimension	Median	DT	Asymmetry	Kurtosis
A. Vision of higher education teaching	3.60	0.348	−1.189	2.015
B. Perception of students' educational needs	3.50	0.434	−0.627	−0.119
C. Knowledge of the context	3.60	0.388	−0.842	0.442
D. Planning and organization of the subject	3.60	0.424	−0.917	0.424
E. Development of teaching	3.60	0.396	−0.952	0.695
F. Communicative capacity	3.60	0.423	−0.919	0.526
G. Individual support for learning	3.20	0.573	−0.405	−0.509
H. Evaluation	3.60	0.431	−0.845	0.425
I. Educational innovation and teaching improvement	3.60	0.429	−0.962	0.625
J. Professional self-evaluation	3.40	0.472	−0.505	−0.326

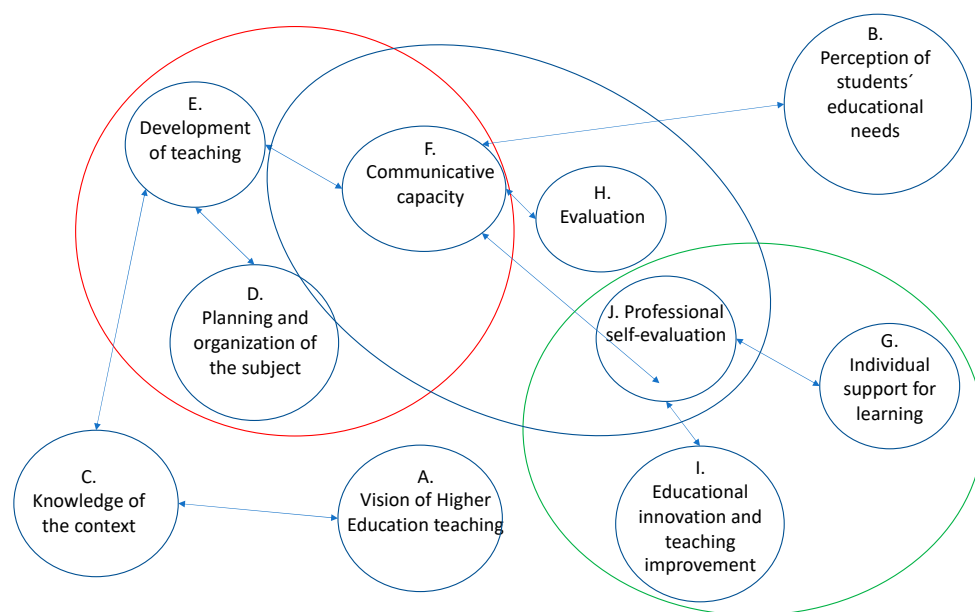
Table 1 also shows the main descriptive data for each dimension. We see that dimensions A, C, D, E, F, H and I reach the highest median value of 3.60 with similar standard deviations, while dimensions B and J have lower medians of 3.50 and 3.40, respectively. All dimensions have negative skewness; therefore, they have a mean lower than the median. Dimension A (vision of university education) is the one with the greatest asymmetry. It is this same dimension A that has the highest kurtosis.

The strongest correlation is established between dimensions E (development of teaching) and F (communicative capacity with a coefficient of 0.794) as shown in Table 2. The correlation between D (planning and organization of the subject) and E (development of teaching) is followed by D (planning and organization of the subject) with a value of 0.766. The communicative capacity (F) is a dimension that correlates with other dimensions, in addition to the one already mentioned (E), namely the dimensions J (professional self-evaluation) with a value of 0.725 and B (perception of the formative needs of students) with a value of 0.685. Professional self-evaluation (J) also correlates with I (teaching innovation and teacher improvement) with a coefficient of 0.666 and with G (individual support for learning) with a coefficient of 0.624.

**Table 2.** Correlations among dimensions.

Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Rho Sperman
A. Vision of higher education teaching	C. Knowledge of the context	0.569
B. Perception of students' educational needs	F. Communicative capacity	0.685
C. Knowledge of the context	E. Development of teaching	0.708
D. Planning and organization of the subject	E. Development of teaching	0.766
E. Development of teaching	F. Communicative capacity	0.794
F. Communicative capacity	E. Development of teaching	0.794
G. Individual support for learning	J. Professional self-evaluation	0.624
H. Evaluation	F. Communicative ability	0.702
I. Teaching innovation and teacher improvement	J. Professional self-evaluation	0.666
J. Professional self-evaluation	F. Communicative capacity	0.725

With these data we have drawn up a correlation map (see Figure 2) in which three correlation loops between the set dimensions are analyzed.



**Figure 2.** Correlation loops between the dimensions analyzed.

The first loop, which appears in the upper left corner of the figure, is made up of dimensions E, F, and D. We call it the technical component of teaching: planning and organization of the subject, teaching development and communicative capacity. The second loop, in the center of the image, is made up of dimensions F, H and J. We have called it the evaluative component: evaluation, professional self-evaluation, and communicative capacity. The third loop is made up of dimensions G, I and J and we have called it the commitment and improvement component: individual support for learning, educational innovation and teaching improvement, and self-evaluation. Therefore, the correlation analysis has allowed us to identify three correlation loops that represent three different areas of professionalization: the technical component, evaluative component, and commitment and improvement component.

Outside of these loops, there are the dimensions C (knowledge of the context) and A (vision of higher education teaching) which correlate with each other and relate to E (development of teaching), on the one hand. On the other hand, there remains dimension B (perception of student's educational needs) which correlates with F (communicative capacity).

### 3.2. Comprehensive/Qualitative Results: Trends of Change in Professionalization

This section presents the trends in the evolution of teacher professionalization, in each dimension, identified in the focus groups as it is summarized on Table 3.

Regarding the dimension of vision of higher education teaching, teachers consider that, in the coming years, the vision of higher education will be affected by the increase in the use of ICTs, the strengthening of the competency-based training approach, personalized learning, and the promotion of the paradigm of inclusion and equity in university systems.

The expected evolution in terms of the dimension of perception of students' educational needs is to connect more and more with the demands of society, with the real professions that students will have to perform at the end of their studies and the skills they will need in the society of the future. All of this involves considering those circumstances that surround each student and the way in which they can affect their education. The changes will come from the consideration of the following factors: the diagnosis and prevention of academic failure, the observation of the new social needs and their inclusion

in the teaching proposals, the development of mentoring, guidance, counseling and personalized tutoring programs, as well as the implementation of curricular models with training flexibility.

**Table 3.** Trends in the evolution of teacher professionalization.

Dimension	Trends
A. Vision of higher education teaching	Increase in the use of ICTs Strengthening of the competency-based training approach Personalized learning Promotion of the paradigm of inclusion and equity in university systems.
B. Perception of students' educational needs	Diagnosis and prevention of academic failure Observation of the new social needs and their inclusion in the teaching proposals Development of mentoring, guidance, counseling, and personalized tutoring programs Implementation of curricular models with training flexibility.
C. Knowledge of the context	Construction of teachers' knowledge with the incorporation of non-traditional foundations and practices from other educational groups Planning of intellectual activity as a constant exercise of prediction and anticipation of social changes Promotion of a new culture of research consistent with the major transformations that are taking place.
D. Planning and organization of the subject	Computational thinking Hybrid learning spaces Integration of ICTs.
E. Development of teaching	Student-centered approach Collaborative and networked learning Integration of ICT; skills-focused training Extended systems of recognition and validation of skills and competencies.
F. Communicative capacity	The internet of things Artificial intelligence Analytical learning Learning management systems.
G. Individual support for learning	Active support Long-term inclusion Career guidance platforms Social and NGO collaboration.
H. Evaluation	Skills-based assessment Personalized assessment Assessment with ICT Continuous and formative assessment Assessment of transversal competencies.
I. Teaching innovation and teacher improvement	Collaborative classrooms Personalized applications Automatic learning Concern for cybersecurity Artificial intelligence Didactic use of the metaverse.
J. Professional self-evaluation	Continuous feedback Incorporation of ICT Evidence-based approach Emphasis on metacognition Multidimensionality.

With regard to the dimension of knowledge of the context, the teachers considered that the following issues will be decisive in future development: the construction of teachers'



knowledge with the incorporation of non-traditional foundations and practices from other educational groups, the planning of intellectual activity as a constant exercise of prediction and anticipation of social changes, and the promotion of a new culture of research consistent with the major transformations that are taking place.

The trends detected by teachers in the dimension of planning and organization of teaching include scheduling around prompts to be able to incorporate AI effectively. Likewise, flexible planning to adapt to different scenarios: face-to-face, non-face-to-face, blended, and individualized. The planning of personalized learning paths that integrate the characteristics and possibilities offered by artificial intelligence is required, as is the generation of neuro-efficient learning environments. Along with this, the most notable general trends in the teaching–learning processes are centered on innovative methodologies with the use of technologies. In summary, the following trends have been identified: computational thinking; hybrid learning spaces; and the integration of ICTs.

The expected evolution in the coming decades in the development dimension of teaching is expected to be influenced by various trends and factors such as those discussed above. Some of the possible evolutions that could occur refer to the following: a student-centered approach; collaborative and networked learning; the integration of ICT; skills-focused training (21st century type); and the extension of systems for the recognition and validation of skills and competencies.

The evolution of the communicative capacity dimension in the university will force teachers to attain new communicative skills mediated by devices and technology. The professors pointed out that changes in communication will come from the use of the following: the internet of things; artificial intelligence; analytical learning; and learning management systems.

The great diversity of situations and needs that students may experience has led to the existence of multiple organizations, programs, and resources aimed at promoting inclusion as a means of meeting the learning needs of all, with special emphasis on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and social exclusion. The trends observed by teachers in the dimension of individual support for learning are the following: active support; long-term inclusion; the use of career guidance platforms; and social and NGO collaboration.

Student evaluation is constantly evolving and is expected to continue to transform in the coming decades. Various factors, such as technological advances, changes in labor market demands, and new educational perspectives, will influence how explanatory indicators are used and how student learning is assessed. In this dimension, teachers warn of changes in areas such as the following: skills-based assessment; personalized assessment; assessment with ICT; continuous and formative assessment; and assessment of transversal competencies.

Teaching innovation involves the implementation of significant changes in pedagogical practices, while teacher improvement focuses on the professional development and continuous improvement in educators. Both aspects are fundamental to promote quality education and ensure student success. The most noteworthy trends in the dimension of teaching innovation and teacher improvement will come from training in the use of the following: collaborative classrooms; personalized applications; automatic learning; concern for cybersecurity; use of artificial intelligence; and didactic use of the metaverse.

Professional self-evaluation is a practice that is expected to continue to be strengthened in the coming decades, as it is fundamental to professional development and continuous improvement in teachers. As the field of education evolves, we are likely to see some changes in the way teacher self-evaluation is implemented. In this dimension, teachers point to the following trends: the continuous feedback approach; the incorporation of ICT; the evidence-based approach; the emphasis on metacognition; and multidimensionality.

#### 4. Discussion

The main change that will take place in the academic profession in the coming decades comes from the increased use of ICTs and the creation of hybrid learning spaces. Hybrid

learning or blended learning, and online learning or e-learning, have been on the rise since the “emergency distance learning” models adopted in the pandemic. This teaching modality seeks to use the potential of technologies to offer personalized and direct teaching with the aim of optimizing face-to-face interactions and class time [62]. In the Ibero-American context, the flipped classroom methodology or inverted classroom has been used for hybrid learning [63] and learning management systems (LMS) (such as Moodle, Google Classroom, Blackboard...) have enabled experiences of face-to-face and virtual learning [64,65]. In this way, technologies for game-based learning and gamification will continue to evolve and provide more engaging and motivating learning experiences. Immersive educational games and gamification mechanics can be used to foster active participation, collaboration, goal achievement, and skill development. Other research confirms [66,67] the findings of this study. We agree with the proposals for the didactic use of AI [68]. The implications of AI in higher education have been addressed in other studies [69]. Other works [70] have reviewed the impact and some of the benefits achieved through the use of learning analytics in virtual environments, and have studied the mobile learning modality [71] as a tool for adaptive learning, with both studies being in the context of higher education. Further along this line of paradigmatic transformation of the academic profession, we have found via the focus groups that there is concern surrounding the design and management of virtual learning environments in LMS platforms [72], and the experiences of faculty and students as instructors or users of these environments [73], which is being explored from b-learning or e-learning.

In line with what we have raised, one study pointed out [74] the tendency to employ strategies and instruments for detecting risk of academic failure as an integrated element of higher education, distinguishing between preventive detections and corrective detections, going a step further than our findings. Among the preventive actions is the detection of social support needs. Also, the change in the formative approach has been announced [75], since traditional strategies do not respond to the formative needs of the student body. Moreover, some studies [76] equate formative needs with competencies and take them as the starting point of the teaching process to reinforce tutorial action. Some research work [77] has already referred to the need to reinforce tutorial action as an activity that provides quality to the system, supporting this trend that we have also found. References to the need to use flexible and motivating teaching strategies have been found [78], which help the social and emotional balance of students. All of this causes a transformation in the nature and content of the professional activities of university teachers, since many of them lack the necessary training in innovative, active, and flexible strategies or methodologies that are necessary to adapt to the new educational scenario [79–81].

The effect of societal changes on the academic profession has been made evident in our study. One of the issues that most frequently appears linked to the knowledge of context is the need to update knowledge in a particular field of study and promote personal development in the workplace [82]. To achieve this integration, it is necessary that the educational model of each university promotes, in its practices of teaching, learning, and research, and in its work coexistence spaces, situations that imply involvement with the community and that make it possible to improve living conditions on the territory of the university [83]. In this study, teachers have echoed the idea of promoting the transfer of knowledge to civil society [84], a process that has the ultimate goal of integrating all the social pillars in the processes of interaction with the university (technological development centers, industrial sectors, companies, governments, social agents and the state), with the ultimate goal that the knowledge generated in higher education institutions has a social, economic, and cultural impact [85]. As outlined, through the transfer of knowledge and cultural extension, learning and social commitment converge. Therefore, an institutional model that efficiently integrates the three missions of higher education begins to take shape; a model in which teaching, research, and extension are simultaneously at the service of academic excellence and a university’s social responsibility. Higher education has gone through historical moments of reinvention to respond to shifting social needs. In this sense,

planning is an intellectual activity, which consists of thinking, in the present, about what has to be achieved in the future; this is increasingly necessary in view of the rapidity in the occurrence of economic, political, social and technological events [86]. Research culture is not created in a vacuum, nor does it operate by decree, as some mistakenly believe. At the base of this culture [87] there must be academic and administrative foundations and conditions that adequately support research work. Only in this way is it possible to construct, in a sustainable manner, an institutional research culture with firm and long-lasting roots, capable of generating lasting impacts on the thinking and doing of future generations, as we have pointed out in the trends set.

In line with what was referred to in our findings on hybrid learning spaces, ref. [88] alludes to future trends addressing the incorporation of smart classrooms. In this context, it has been detected that theories and approaches to learning and teaching have shifted from focusing on passive learning to active and lifelong learning [89]. It has been declared that the [81] learner-centered approach is related to the knowledge of active methodologies. In fact, the works found in the scientific literature suggest, as we do, that active methodologies are being used in university teaching and that, in general, they are perceived positively by both teachers and students [90]. In addition, pedagogical approaches that use ICT are growing exponentially, being included in OECD proposals for the design of innovative learning environments [63,91], or through the Horizon Report in which technological trends in education are collected. Specifically, the 2022 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report [92] indicates that the trend in higher education over the next five years (2022–2026) is linked to hybrid and online learning, competence-based learning, distance work, learning analytics and big data, the (re)definition of teaching modalities, and cybersecurity. This trend is corroborated by our findings. Similarly, the studies suggest that university professors use various active methodologies based on ICT in their teaching, among which the following stand out: gamification and game-based learning with scape room, kahoot, etc. [93,94]; flipped classroom through Edpuzzle or Youtube, for example [95,96]; or other active methodologies, such as those mentioned above. In conjunction with these, they incorporate technological resources for accessing web information (websites, wikis, encyclopedia), for making presentations (Prezzy, Genially, Microsoft PowerPoint-version office 365, LibreOffice Impress, etc.), and the use of LMS platforms and interactive digital learning resources (learning games or apps, virtual reality, augmented reality, etc.) [97]. In this respect [98], it has been highlighted that active methodologies combined with technology can increase the commitment and qualification of students in the learning process, but that the effectiveness of technology also depends on planning, group characteristics, and teacher mediation. Although they do not appear among our detected trends, the literature does point out and in Ibero-America there are innovations centered on the use of robotics [99] among others, as a didactic tool or methodology for the development of computational thinking and STEAM experiences have been implemented as an innovative methodology [100,101], and will continue to be a trend with the OECD's effort to increase the number of girls in STEM careers in Latin America and the Caribbean (NiñaSTEM program). As detected in the focus groups regarding inclusive education, this is the main formative challenge of our time [102]. In the case of Spanish universities, ref. [103] argue that the incorporation of services for students with disabilities requires the participation of the entire university community in order to promote a process of true inclusion. However, we agree with these authors when they state that at present there are no standardized protocols to assist students with special educational needs in a similar way in the different institutions of higher education.

## 5. Conclusions

Our study has allowed us to identify three core areas of academic activity around which academics perceive the major transformations affecting their teaching professionalization: the first is around planning, teaching development, and communicative situations in higher education; the second is around their own communicative capacity and evalu-

ation and self-evaluation activities; the third is around innovation, teacher development, individual learning support, and professional self-evaluation.

We have described and characterized the perceived trends of change in each of these areas of teacher professionalization. It has become clear that the massification of university classrooms, the need to incorporate inclusive pedagogical designs and the incorporation of technological advances in teaching will lead to a paradigm shift in the academic profession.

The analysis of the information gathered in each of the ten focus groups has allowed us to draw a set of four possible future scenarios for teacher professionalization, with which we conclude the study.

1. It is possible to consider a scenario of resistance to social and systematic changes by building it from the trenches of academic cultures and denying the reality of the facts, continuing with institutional inertia as far as it takes us. In this scenario, we will have to coexist with more dynamic educational institutions that are adapting to the transformations. The traditional university will gradually lose social support. This is the scenario of entrenched professionalism.
2. A second scenario describes a weakened profession, with loss of control in all its functions, in the face of intelligent systems, and unregulated, transversal, multidisciplinary and collaborative research. This is the scenario in which the academic profession will be diluted among training agents and knowledge mediators of very diverse origins and interests. This scenario is pure dystopia and it is the scenario of semi-professionalism.
3. The most discouraging is the scenario of acute deprofessionalization, extreme bureaucratization, progressive discomfort, and permanent dislocation, which is the scenario we are generating now, and which threatens to collapse the system we know. It is the scenario of fragmented professionalism.
4. The most positive scenario is that of increased academic professionalization with a balance between research and teaching functions. This is a possible scenario that could be triggered by social pressure for pedagogical innovation caused by massification, universal access to higher education and the advantage of integrating ICTs in teaching. It would be a scenario of balanced professionalism.

Any scenario is possible. After all, the academic body is at the service of the best interests of society and students. Social transformations will lead the way. We will have to adjust to the new needs.

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