





The role of non-licensed professionals in Colombian higher education: Identity and pedagogical training

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the relationship between teacher identity and pedagogical training among Non-licensed professionals (NLPs) in Colombian higher education. A content analysis (CA) is employed to analyze academic sources, including doctoral theses and indexed articles, focusing on identity formation and pedagogical development using qualitative research design. The findings reveal that NLPs demonstrate deep expertise in their respective fields while many lack formal pedagogical training which is essential for developing effective teaching practices. This gap not only affects the quality of education but also delays the development of a coherent and transformative teacher identity. This study underscores the importance of continuous pedagogical training that emphasizes both personal and professional growth, moving beyond knowledge acquisition to address individual and collective dimensions of development. It concludes that higher education institutions must implement structured training programs that align technical expertise with pedagogical practices enabling NLPs to create enriched learning environments and contribute more effectively to educational transformation. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for policies supporting NLPs' development as teachers and professionals, inviting further exploration of the challenges and opportunities they face. Such initiatives are crucial to ensure quality education and promote meaningful contributions to the academic community.

Contribution/Originality: Most research on teacher identity and pedagogical training focuses on licensed teachers in primary and secondary education neglecting non- licensed professionals in higher education. This study explores how the lack of pedagogical training shapes their teaching identity and limits their potential, offering recommendations to enhance their growth and improve education quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not merely the transmission of knowledge. It is deeply connected to societal goals serving as a foundation for developing human capital and raising social cohesion (Kaasila, Lutovac, & Uitto, 2023; Liang, Meissel, & Ell, 2024). Education relies on the state as a central figure and involves various stakeholders who contribute in different ways as a complex social and cultural phenomenon (Moonthiya & Stevenson, 2024). Among these, teachers are essential figures who guide knowledge exchange, shape student subjectivities, and promote critical thinking and innovation (Delors, 1996). Their role goes beyond instruction, positioning them as co-creators of knowledge that drives educational progress.

However, there is growing concern about the increasing number of individuals in teaching roles who lack formal pedagogical training or a clearly defined teacher identity in Colombia and across Latin America known in Colombia as "non-licensed professionals" (NLPs). These individuals bring strong expertise in their disciplines but often lack the pedagogical foundations needed for effective teaching and learning processes (Congreso de la República, 1992, 1994, 2002, 2019). This gap transcends pedagogical skills highlighting challenges in identity formation as teachers. NLPs may struggle with teaching complexities such as student engagement, assessment, and curriculum design without formal training (Beregal Vázquez, Daza Pérez, Carapeto Pacheco, & Rivas Flores, 2024; Rodés Paragarino & Gewerc, 2022).

The growing presence of NLPs in higher education makes it essential to investigate their identity and professional development. This study addresses the following question: "What elements define the identity and training of teachers among NLPs in the higher-education context?" A documentary analysis strategy was employed examining academic sources such as doctoral theses, peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports, and expert commentaries. Content analysis (CA) was used to uncover themes related to identity formation, pedagogical training and the social contexts in which NLPs operate. This approach reveals patterns and nuances in how NLPs balance their dual roles as subject matter experts and teachers often without the formal pedagogical support typically available to licensed teachers.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to offer a fresh perspective on the role of NLPs in higher education. This study contributes to a broader understanding of how teachers regardless of their formal qualifications can shape the learning experiences of students and impact the quality of education by examining their identity formation and pedagogical practices (Brunner & Labraña, 2020). Moreover, the results highlight the differences between institutional norms and NLPs' real-world experiences. These conflicts are frequently caused by regulatory frameworks that impose strict requirements that could not properly consider the variety of experiences and skills that NLPs bring to their teaching roles. This research advocates for a review of these frameworks proposing that more flexible and inclusive policies are necessary to support NLPs in their professional development.

The implications of this research extend beyond individual teachers. It raises critical questions about the nature of teacher professionalism and how institutions define and support effective teaching. The presence of NLPs introduces a new dimension to the discourse on educational quality in a context where education systems are increasingly under pressure to meet global standards. This study invites a reconsideration of how teacher identity is constructed and how pedagogical skills are developed in non-traditional pathways. This study sheds light on a marginalized yet significant segment of the teaching workforce, offering insights that could inform both policy and practice in higher education by focusing on NLPs.

In a nutshell, this research seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive examination of the identity and training of NLPs in higher education. This study offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by NLPs through the lens of identity formation and pedagogical development. Finally, this research underscores the importance of recognizing the diverse pathways into teaching and calls for a more inclusive approach to teacher development, one that values both pedagogical and disciplinary expertise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to reveal certain decisive aspects in the practice of teaching not only in the act itself but also in the construction of the identity traits of those who teach and assess the current panorama regarding higher education. Hernández and Sancho (1996) emphasized that over the last two decades, the construction of teacher identity has emphasized the importance of training and initial teaching experiences in shaping how individuals learn to become teachers (p. 471). However, there is still a lack of literature on the particular difficulties experienced by

non-licensed professionals (NLPs) in higher education even if a significant amount of it focusses on general teacher identity (Giladi, Davidovitch, & Ben-Meir, 2022).

The term "identity" derives from the Latin "idem," meaning "the same," and the abstract suffix "-ity," which indicates quality. Thus, in this context, identity refers to the qualities that predominate and lead a group to recognize itself as part of it. Teacher identity is closely linked to the concept of professional identity which reflects how teachers perceive their roles, plan their lessons, and engage with students (Zeng & Liu, 2024). Imbernón (2007a) argued that the professional identity of a teacher dictates how they think, project, plan and execute their duties and establish themselves as educators. This teaching identity is described by the author in the following way:

"A set of traits or information that individualizes or distinguishes something and confirms that it truly is what it is claimed to be, identity results from the capacity for reflexivity, that is, the ability of a person to be the object of their analysis. It is understood as an organization or a structure of self-knowledge" (p. 139).

Moreover, the author added that teaching identity is a structure *that assumes unity, totality, and continuity. This continuity is shaped during everyday life in the constant performance of roles in an unending communicative process. It is a synthesis that allows us to make sense of experience, integrate new elements, and harmonize the sometimes contradictory and conflicting processes that occur in integrating what we believe, we are and what we would like to be, between what we were in the past and what we are today"* (p. 139).

This has led to numerous ideas and standpoints primarily stemming from teachers' experience. However, there is limited research exploring how NLPs particularly in Latin American higher education, develop their professional identities without formal pedagogical training (Brunner & Labraña, 2020; Liang et al., 2024).

In this respect, Imbernón (2007a) remarked that "teachers are used to hear that their work is not a true profession but at most a semi-profession" (p. 13) because it lacks the typical features of "liberal professions." This uncertainty impacts those who have opted to dedicate themselves to teaching particularly when teaching cannot merely be defined as just another traditional profession.

Thus, other external elements emerge that are part of this construction and extend beyond the mere act of teaching by proposing identity as the element that professionalizes and encompasses teachers in terms of shared qualities. This includes substantive functions that lead to a subjective creation of the work of teachers contrary to what Cantón and Tardiff (2018) stated:

"Professionalization associated with autonomous performance with responsibility for the task performed. However, these characteristics are not legislated. They are built from the convergence of three elements: the existence of an appropriate work environment; quality initial and ongoing training and management and evaluation that enhance the professional practice of teachers" (p. 1).

The aforementioned discussion helps us identify some elements that constitute teacher identities. According to Zabalza (2009) the first component—the existence of a suitable work environment as proposed by Cantón (2018) allows for the teacher's professional and personal growth in terms of the triangular interaction of teacher, student, and institution. This aspect is too broad to achieve complete fulfilment. *"Teacher identity translates into personal satisfaction where the working conditions under which teachers operate play a significant role marked by a curious love-hate relationship, perhaps due to all the pressure exerted on individual faculty in relation to quality policies and their implementation in evaluations and other bureaucratic demands"* (p. 70).

Recent studies have expanded on the idea that teaching is more than a profession. It is a social practice intertwined with personal satisfaction and professional development (Giladi et al., 2022). This suggests that a productive workplace requires good working conditions similar to in any other profession. Compensation and compliance, opportunities for advancement, a positive work atmosphere, and everything else that creates a comfortable and enjoyable setting that particularly helps both professional and personal development. In this regard, Zabalza (2009) stated that

“Working conditions significantly impact the professional practice of teachers. The most challenging periods—bordering on 'precarity' in some cases often occur at the beginning and end of a teaching career. Initially, this is due to the various forms of precarious contracts and grants offered (precarity often tied more to length or conditions rather than remuneration). Towards the end of a career, retirement brings about a reduction to basic wages and pension which seems absurd after having developed a much higher standard of living” (p. 70).

At this stage, the importance of environments as reflected in what could be labelled working conditions and life quality becomes evident. This reinforces the importance of recognizing how external factors, such as institutional policies and work conditions impact NLPs who often face precarious contracts and lack access to continuous professional development (Brunner & Labraña, 2020; Giladi et al., 2022). These undoubtedly include interpersonal relationships encompassing interactions with students, administrative staff, and professional peers. Another aspect highlighted in the proposals of the authors mentioned relates to the opportunities for and accessibility to relevant professional development that not only contributes to teaching proficiency but also fosters personal growth and development. This situation underscores the recognition of another constituent element of teacher identity that influences practice and recurs in theoretical reviews. The aspect identified by Cantón and Tardiff (2018) which emphasizes knowledge and ongoing education as sources of development and recognition is driven by individual motivation yet aimed at contributing to the field of action. This agrees with Imbernón's (2007a) analysis of the current state of teachers.

“From the autonomous and dependent tendency, the latter can indeed constitute a 'reductionist professional culture in terms of the identity of a civil servant teacher who fulfills some tasks rather than a professional within a pedagogical team engaging in learning and education, considering it from a social perspective, the barriers to professionalization, workplace environments, values and all aspects related to the curriculum” (p. 10).

These insights affirm that based on personal, professional or workplace needs, teachers construct, define, and recognize themselves. According to the parameters considered necessary for initiating or maintaining their teaching roles, they seek to establish their identity within their contexts, an identity that can be developed. This translates into knowledge and ongoing training which are seen as the continuous development in response to the demands of the profession, as recognized in the field and in the development of that professional identity.

Similarly, various elements such as subjectivity shaped by context, skills and both personal and professional social needs which represent the complexity of the teaching profession are recognized. On this topic, Imbernón (2007b) posited that

“Recognizing the complexity of teacher thought and practice means accepting that promoting training that facilitates reflection and intuition can make teachers better planners and managers of teaching-learning and better social agents who can also engage in complex ethical and political systems that form the social and labor structure” (p. 119).

It is relevant to highlight that the teacher decides and assumes their knowledge, not merely in disciplinary terms, given the subjectivity, complexity, and reflective features of teaching as part of the creation of their identity. According to Zuluaga (1999).

“Courses in Epistemology and Pedagogy, History of Pedagogy, Educational Research, and Didactics should be given priority as they provide the appropriate setting for such a placement. Thought of as a block of pedagogical disciplines, they should include a line of reflection embodied in their objectives and content, the appropriation by students of a history of pedagogy as a discipline and of pedagogical knowledge, not to permeate all the disciplines necessary in the training of future teachers, but to build conceptual and methodological tools that allow teachers to articulate and at the same time differentiate 'pedagogical theory' (I prefer to say the conceptualizations of pedagogy) and the teaching of specific knowledge” (p. 20).

Thus, it aligns with Vaillant (2007).

“This identity does not automatically emerge from a professional degree; rather, it must be built. This requires an individual and collective process of a complex and dynamic nature that leads to the formation of subjective representations about the teaching profession” (p. 3).

Furthermore, Imbernón (2007a) pointed out that the educational profession is not merely a technicality. It constitutes a social practice for those who engage in it toward those who teach with their colleagues in which "the developmental aspect of the person" is essential for both individual and collective development as individuals. As proclaimed by the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, the progress of education also depends on "the human qualities of each teacher" in addition to their competence and professionalism. These latter aspects can be seen in the classification by Kerchner and Mitchell (1983) which considers the teacher not just as a worker, professional, and craftsman but also as an artist.

"The teacher as an artist emphasizes personal creativity and allows for a higher degree of teaching autonomy. The acquisition of general and professional culture is conditioned and shaped through intuition, personality, and individual dynamism" (p. 1).

Training and identity are naturally interconnected. Identity is nourished by training, as described by Imbernón (2007b) who defined the teacher as a "subject of training with a teacher identity" with a history and explained that "the ongoing training of teachers requires them to assume a teaching identity, which implies an assumption of being a subject of training and not an object of it as a mere malleable and manipulable instrument in the hands of others" (p. 89).

Indeed, traditional teacher training has not and does not consider the identity that exists as emphasized by Imbernón (2007b) "with characteristics, values, peculiarities, and social and educational practices determined as a habitus, proposed by Bourdieu, as a particular way of doing things" (p. 90). Working together and projecting group identities from the individual also reinforces this identity.

Therefore, a critical vision of teaching itself can be attained by acknowledging the existence of an identity because it requires a personal involvement that allows the construction of the teaching subject and his or her pedagogical knowledge through the same subjectivity that is established in the profession itself.

This new element of pedagogical knowledge has an intentionality constituting a vast and accessible field through which dissertations at different levels explore allowing for a detailed inspection of the relationships that arise from pedagogical practice and other constitutive elements of education (pedagogy and didactics). Accordingly, pedagogical knowledge is seen as a constitutive element that encompasses vast knowledge and tools in terms of theory and practice and is configured as a dominant and identity-forming element of the teaching exercise.

Similarly, Tardif (2004) stated that the knowledge of teachers constitutes a social reality that is "materialized" in teaching practices, curricula, didactics, pedagogy and others. However, it largely arises from their own and individual knowledge which shapes their work. This knowledge has been shaped by them. Therefore, it is essential that training considers such knowledge and the "specific realities of their work," denominated by Tardif (2004) as experiential knowledge.

Furthermore, according to Bustamante (2012b) and Bustamante (2021a) this teacher's identity is reflected in "a perspective in relation to knowledge because they profess something that needs to be said from immersion in a field of knowledge and the teacher embodies and mobilizes something of desire" (pp. 89-91). Furthermore, it is something that is embodied if one has it. The professional identity is reflected in him because that teacher is present. "If he is there to earn money or if the matter commits him" and what mark does a teacher leave, not "in information... but to what the teacher embodied for the student" (p. 92).

The previous statements lead to the determination that the construction of the teacher's identity is not rigid, nor does it contain elements that determine it one way or another. This is constituted in a subjective and individual manner, according to the political, cultural, and institutional context in which the human being who embodies the teacher recognizes themselves as such. In this regard, according to Imbernón (2007a) the teaching trajectory and its professional identity continue as a matter of concern since these two components are still not validated as unavoidable factors in the construction of the teacher training line. For such reasons, identity has the characteristic

of being changeable. It is established during the professional exercise of the teacher. Thus, it changes and yet does not cease to constitute itself as an identity.

Thus, the alignment of the elements contained in the identity of the higher education teacher is noted which is configured through various subjective aspects where it is developed based on the needs, motivations, and demands of the contexts as a permanent process under construction. Zabalza (2011) stated that "in the case of university teaching, the idea has taken strong root that to teach it is not necessary to know pedagogy. It is enough to handle the subject that is intended to be taught to the students well" (p. 402). This represents a determining factor reflected in the motivation and reflections of their position which in most cases are based on positions where their discipline and their experience prevail in the NLP. This shows their lack of understanding of the relevance of training in pedagogy which allows determining how to teach, what to teach, and ensuring that it adjusts to the reality of the classroom.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research aims to design an epistemic and semantic path based on a qualitative paradigm. For this purpose, the definition proposed by Chavarría (2006) is used as a reference describing it as an exploration of the unknown or little-known dimensions of a social fact, including its context, history, social relationships and exchanges, social representations, language, the notion of an inclusive subject, fundamental interests and the ethical-emic-researcher triangle.

Additionally, the qualitative paradigm is descriptive-interpretative aiming to identify and analyze emerging categories that help approach information gathered from the academic environment. This is done through specific categories by which non-licensed professionals (NLPs) either forge their identity or not and how this influences their participation in pedagogical training processes.

For the implementation of the methodological design, the content analysis (CA) approach proposed by Ruiz (2001) is considered. This tool meets the needs and objectives of researchers in social areas by allowing for an understanding of the complexity of the social reality without oversimplifying or reducing it. CA comprises three levels as follows:

- *Surface:* This level aims to establish statements, questions and formulations present in written testimonies to identify references and characteristics of the initial subject.
- *Analytical:* It involves organizing statements, questions, and formulations based on their affinity or differentiation, creating categories that classify and organize information. Therefore, a delimitation strategy is used, thus expanding the elements found in more than 46 documents. Then, using the intensive strategy, the analyzed elements (indexed articles) are integrated to the maximum relying on the authors' conceptions to understand the experiences of the themes. Next, the determination strategy is used through the intertextual strategy to establish the meaning of texts by comparing them with other testimonies collected in the research process. Finally, the testimonies are taken and unified into a single category called "identity and pedagogical training" focusing on the NLPs through the aggregative method.
- *Interpretative:* At this level, the researcher's ability to understand the meaning of information acquired at the surface level, organized at the analytical level, and to give it new meaning is emphasized. In the research process, information is obtained, classified, and organized to produce an analytical metatext, where interpretations of reflection in relation to the categories are explained.

Testimony collection focuses on institutional databases, repositories, and official pages, such as the Ministry of Education. Databases of indexed articles, including Web of Science, Dialnet, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, and Scopus are also considered. Similarly, the classification of information considers the analyzed categories: identity and pedagogical training among NLPs. Finally, more than 63 documents were grouped, of which 17 were discarded and 46 articles were selected. These were classified according to research criteria related to the identity and training of

NLPs in the higher education context in Colombia. The selected articles were coded with the letter "A" followed by the numbers 1 to 46.

Furthermore, analysis tools were employed at the analytical level such as analytical matrices. These matrices contain textual citations referring to identity or pedagogical training allowing for the construction of a concept that reflects elements found in written citations. This process highlights relationships and understandings regarding the configuration of identity and pedagogical training concepts among NLPs. Figure 1 illustrates the surface-level execution and partial analytical- level execution for one of the testimonies collected. The matrix, "individual CA of indexed articles," shows coding, article names, their relationship to the categories, textual citations, and concept relations.

Code	Article	Category
A5	Toward a pedagogy of higher education: Survey on learning and reflection on teaching practice	Teaching training
Surface level (References)		
"The training of university teachers requires the search for alternatives, paths, and strategies to shape this new professional who not only knows their discipline well but also moves away from the idea that learning is solely the student's problem" (p.27).		
Analytical level (Characteristics)		
The teacher must know their own discipline, but also be a learning professional.		

Figure 1. Individual CA matrix of indexed articles.

Additionally, the aggregative method is employed to collect testimonies and unify them into a single category in the process of information systematization through the intertextual strategy. It is determined that the categories explored across all testimonies are identity and pedagogical training. Figure 2 provides a general matrix illustrating the analytical process showing the triangulation between the primary categories (identity and pedagogical training) and the references and characteristics found in the 46 documents selected.

Code	Article	Category
A32	Teacher training for integral and sustainable human development	Teacher identity
Surface level (References)		
<p>"It is considered that the competencies that a university teacher must strengthen or develop, depending on the case, are, in the first instance, being a human being inserted in a web of socio-cultural and environmental relations, which, by free choice, has assumed academic life as the meaning of their existence. First, one is a human being and then a teacher, not the other way around" (p.136).</p>		
Analytical level (Traits)		
Sense of their existence		
Interpretative level		
<p>Critically reflecting on one's own teaching practice and pedagogical work, whether through evaluation processes or research, is a recurrent and key aspect for generating associated actions linked to the training of NLPs (Non-legally qualified teachers) in the university context. Likewise, it indicates that these actions are not separate from dynamic interrelations between the work inside and outside the classroom, allowing the teacher to participate in their own labor and critically analyze what happens inside and outside the classroom.</p>		

Figure 2. General CA matrix of indexed articles for the “pedagogical training” category.

Finally, at the interpretative level, although the steps have been described in sequence, they are carried out transversally, meaning there is no strict order. The key elements that define the identity and pedagogical training of NLPs are characterized forming the basis for the metatext throughout the description, analysis, and interpretation phases.

4. RESULTS

The pursuit of developing a new culture among teachers has driven inquiries into the primary factors influencing such construction and in the achievement of quality in terms of professionalization and towards high-quality education. In these studies, the indissoluble relationship between identity and training emerges highlighting a significant connection with non-licensed professionals (NLPs) who lack foundational elements in their profession to consolidate this relationship in the context of university teaching.

Imbernón (2007a) initially questioned, "What is the identity of the teaching staff when they undergo a training process and how would this training help them conceive a new professional teaching identity?" Furthermore, how can training provide answers to all these questions that arise in the practice of teaching and enable the possibility of developing a professional teaching project and increasing their understanding of educational reality?

Similarly, Tardif (2004) expressed concerns about the knowledge that serves as a basis for the teaching profession since teachers have a unique identity that cannot be separated from their training. This is even more pertinent for NLPs who aside from having their personal identity, have also developed a professional identity (e.g., veterinarian, engineer, nurse, manager, economist). Therefore, neither personal nor previously established professional identities can be separated from teacher training:

"The teacher "does not think only with the head," but "with life," with what they have been, lived through, and accumulated in terms of life experience and certainties. Essentially, they think from their life history, not merely in an intellectual sense but also in an emotional, personal, and interpersonal context" (p. 75).

This raises the question: Where does the importance of training lie? According to Runge Peña, Muñoz Gaviria, and Ospina Cruz (2015), the feasibility of education or its absence requires a pedagogical reflection in relation to anthropological thought. This reflection considers the essence of being human, the possibilities of education, and its paths, objectives, and purposes (p. 10).

Like training, education demands that the teacher's identity scrutinize and reflect on the scenarios they influence, how they are affected, and their significance.

According to Imbernón (2007a) quality education demands that there be no distinct phase for teacher training separate from the phase of active educational practice since it should be permanent and simultaneous.

Therefore, over the years, identity and training have adapted to evolving needs. Although this connection has been evident, it has only been perceived and categorized from a functionalist viewpoint, not a subjective one, especially since the focus has been on consolidating efforts around training and professional development in terms of generic competencies for practice. For this reason, it raises "the equally important question in the pedagogical field about training about the human process of self-constitution" (Runge Peña et al., 2015). Imbernón (2007a) then poses the question about the relationship between identity and training: *"Am I an object of training or a subject of training with a teaching identity?"*.

Indeed, training supports the development of professional identity because it helps define the meaning of practice, acquire new knowledge, and transform both individual and collective identities. According to Imbernón (2007b).

"The literature on teacher education often uses the concepts of self and identity interchangeably. As a concept, identity is closely related to the self. Both are complex constructions, largely because they are based on significant theoretical and research areas in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and psychotherapy. Training is a process that begins with the practical experience of teachers, as praxis (p. 46)."

According to Imbernón (2007b) training for identity is essential so that the teacher's subjectivity is vindicated and the teaching identity can gain dynamism to transform the immediate social and educational reality into a new production of educational knowledge. This includes incorporating the teachers' own narratives in an intersubjective training process towards appropriating a rich repertoire of self-generated professional knowledge, both for the individual teacher's identity and the group teacher's identity.

Recognizing identity allows teachers (licensed or not) to better interpret their work and interact more effectively with all stakeholders in their educational settings through training. Thus, identity cannot be separated from training because "teachers' life experiences are related to their professional tasks as teaching requires personal involvement" (p. 93). Moreover, training is only genuinely integrated if it becomes an important part of the profession. If teachers want to be protagonists of their training and professional development. It is imperative to innovate and change teaching practice and to develop both personally and professionally (p. 93). Furthermore, "the

significance of training lies in that, if those who teach can articulate their conceptions about teaching, training helps them legitimize, modify, or dismantle these conceptions" (p. 93).

Thus, according to Imbernón (2007b) training serves as a predominant weapon, beneficial or detrimental depending on the path of professional development chosen by the teacher. This last element is "a set of factors that either enable or prevent teachers from advancing in their identity. Improved training and autonomy to decide will aid in that development" (p.94) along with other factors such as salary, recognition, legislation and workplace environment. Training is central to the development of the teaching profession but requires that these environmental factors be adequate and guaranteed as excellent training without a developmental plan for teaching hampers personal and identity progress. Now, this is becoming even more crucial as conditions are needed for teachers to transition from being the objects of training to the subjects of training in the specific case of NLPs.

In this context, teacher training should advocate for the vindication of a teaching identity in which teachers recognize themselves where they feel accepted and acknowledged by others. It is an opportunity to question who one is as a teacher, how one performs their work, whether one is satisfied with their actions and what motivated the individual to become a teacher. This suggests that a profession should be viewed as a path for individual professional growth, requiring reflection on the expectations must surpass within the field. However, according to Runge Peña and Garcés Gómez (2011) the impact of training on identity holds its importance. According to Lepenies (1981).

"To identify a disciplinary field, it is necessary to consider its "cognitive identity" which relates to what could be termed the specificity of the discipline (objects, issues, concepts, approaches, its "social identity," referring to the institutional recognition and material existence—such as institutes, departments—enjoyed by that disciplinary or knowledge field and its "historical identity," related to a continuity over time and the historicity of its issues, conceptualizations, and institutions" (p. 14).

Therefore, training must consider both individual and collective identities so that teachers become active subjects in their formation and not objects of instrumentalization. Professional development should extend beyond the mastery of disciplines, focusing on recovering ethical awareness, reconceptualizing the profession, and constructing a true teaching identity towards a consolidation of both identity and training. This is important because of the key role that the teacher or professor plays. Moreover, Tardif (2004) suggests that teachers should no longer be regarded as experts who apply knowledge generated by others, but rather as

"Teachers as subjects who possess, use, and produce specific knowledge from their profession, from their work [...] Teachers hold a fundamental position in relation to all school community: in their daily interactions with students, they are the main actors and mediators of school culture and knowledge. Ultimately, the educational mission of the school rests on their shoulders" (p. 168).

Therefore, it is necessary to free the teacher from the natural duality of roles that arise from practice. On one hand, from the identity and subjectivity as an "unconscious toy of the social forces that determine their action" and on the other hand, as a repeater of theories and knowledge originated by someone else proposed within a curriculum.

In a nutshell, teacher training and teacher identity form an essential interrelation for university educators to actively embrace the leading role they play in enhancing the quality of higher education and society itself, towards a real construction of the teaching profession, consciously structuring the experience of those involved in the educational act and ensuring it is not merely a subjective or intuitive action on the part of those who teach.

5. DISCUSSION

There are numerous studies on teacher identity and training; few have considered the context of higher education and non-licensed professionals (NLPs) who perform teaching roles in this setting. This highlights the uniqueness of this research as an opportunity for critical reflection by both universities and NLPs across the countries. Moreover, the conceptualization from ministries and national regulations regarding NLPs in Colombia is

unclear in specifying the levels of academic training with a pedagogical emphasis. Therefore, the training of professional teachers urgently needs to be evaluated, setting minimum standards to achieve the academic positioning of NLPs, and including a deepening of research processes. This would not only strengthen autonomy and professional qualification by developing real pedagogical knowledge but also generate academic strategies and attributes that enhance mediation and didactics applied to specific disciplines.

Regarding the research's methodological design, the chosen approach was action research based on Ruiz's (2001) framework, as a tool in social research that addresses the needs and objectives of researchers. This approach allows for an understanding of the complexity of the social reality being studied and helps to avoid oversimplification and reductionism. The findings from AR characterized some of the most relevant elements defining the identity and training of university teachers among NLPs in Colombia as detailed below.

The continuous training of teachers should be configured as both personal and professional motivation, encouraging teachers to remain in a permanent training process for their profession and for their own aspirations of self-fulfillment. Teachers should not pursue training solely because their context and reality demand it but also as a personal choice, acquiring significance and dignity for the profession. Similarly, training processes, didactics, and pedagogies need to go beyond mere knowledge sharing in the classroom, becoming part of the life project and reality of those who undertake the labor and professional challenges that the current market demands of NLPs in training.

In a nutshell, this study highlights the crucial relationship between identity and teacher training. It has been shown that teacher training plays a fundamental role in the construction and transformation of professional teaching identity through the analysis of various theoretical perspectives. Moreover, teacher training is not only about acquiring knowledge and competencies but also involves a process of personal and professional development that encompasses life experiences, emotions, and feelings. This training allows teachers to reflect on their identity, question their pedagogical conceptions, and promote quality educational practice.

It is essential to recognize that teacher training must go beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and focus on promoting ethical awareness, reconceptualizing the profession and building a solid teaching identity. This training should consider both individual and collective aspects, fostering teachers' participation in their own professional development.

Teacher identity plays a central role in the exercise of the profession and in interactions with educational stakeholders. Teacher training should contribute to the affirmation of an accepted and recognized teaching identity enabling teachers to assume their leading role in improving education. This indissoluble relationship between identity and teacher training is fundamental for the development of the profession and the pursuit of educational quality. A holistic approach is required considering both individual and collective aspects, so that teachers can play an active and transformative role in education.

Finally, these findings, far from exhausting the possibilities of problematization and research around the identity and training of NLPs (as well as other emerging categories) in universities, aim to encourage further inquiries, not only in education faculties but also in those with a significant presence of these professionals. It is essential for the training of future professionals to ensure quality education with the professional teacher as both the protagonist and the trainer.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study reaffirms the crucial importance of the relationship between teacher identity and pedagogical training for non-licensed professionals (NLPs) who take on teaching roles in the university sector in Colombia. It has been shown that pedagogical training is essential not only for the development of technical skills but also for the construction of a coherent and committed teaching identity through the analysis of a wide range of documentary sources.

It is concluded that pedagogical training should be viewed as a continuous process, oriented towards both personal and professional growth. This kind of training encourages teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practices and commit to transforming the academic environment. For NLPs, it provides an opportunity to move beyond their technical expertise, connecting their knowledge with teaching strategies that truly enhance the learning experience for students.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of balancing individual and collective aspects in the training process. Teacher identity isn't something static—it evolves through constant interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational system. Teachers can take an active role in their development and help create a vibrant learning community focused on achieving academic excellence by encouraging this dynamic perspective.

However, there are significant gaps in current policies regarding the training of NLPs in Colombia. Institutions need to step up by designing formal strategies that provide these professionals with the support they need to grow as educators. Ensuring quality education goes beyond technical knowledge; it's about giving teachers the tools to build engaging and reflective classrooms where students can succeed.

Finally, this research calls on universities and policymakers to recognize the value of continuous training. It's time to develop programs that not only teach technical skills but also focus on helping educators grow holistically. The consolidation of a well-founded and solid teaching identity is key to ensuring the quality of university education, and NLPs, when adequately trained, can play a transformative role in the educational system. This study opens the door to future research on the crucial role of NLPs in higher education, not only in Colombia but also in other international contexts.

6.1. Limitations

While this study offers important contributions to the analysis of the relationship between teacher identity and pedagogical training for NLPs in the Colombian context, it is necessary to recognize some limitations that may influence the generalization of the findings.

Firstly, the methodological approach based on documentary analysis is limited to the available sources and their respective interpretations while suitable for exploring an emerging field. The inclusion of primary data such as interviews or focus groups with NLPs could have enriched the understanding of their experiences and perceptions regarding their identity and pedagogical training. This limitation does not affect the validity of the study but suggests the need for future research with more participatory approaches.

Secondly, the study focuses exclusively on the Colombian context which may limit the applicability of the findings to other countries with different regulatory frameworks and educational contexts. Although the findings are highly relevant to Colombia, future research could expand the analysis regionally and internationally to explore variations in teacher training and identity dynamics across diverse educational contexts.

Finally, although the study emphasizes the importance of continuous training for NLPs, there is no direct empirical data on the impact of existing training initiatives. Future research could focus on case studies or longitudinal analyses that more precisely measure the effects of pedagogical training programs on the teaching performance of NLPs.

In a nutshell, these limitations do not undermine the validity of the findings but highlight key areas for future research that further explore the impact and practical application of pedagogical training in different educational contexts.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for both institutional and governmental actions to support the pedagogical development of non-licensed professionals (NLPs) in Colombian and Latin American higher education. To address this, it is essential to establish clear national standards that require NLPs to undertake

pedagogical training. These standards should outline the minimum teaching competencies expected, ensuring that all university educators regardless of their disciplinary background, receive adequate training in pedagogy. One practical approach could involve implementing continuous education programs that NLPs complete throughout their teaching careers.

Universities are also encouraged to institutionalize ongoing professional development programs tailored specifically to NLPs. These programs should offer flexibility, combining online and in-person sessions, and adapting to the unique needs of different academic disciplines. The goal is to help NLPs build a strong teaching identity while equipping them with modern pedagogical tools to create student-centered learning environments.

To promote participation, institutions could introduce incentives such as career advancement opportunities, salary increases, or academic recognition for NLPs who complete these training programs. Such measures would encourage sustained engagement and elevate the professional status of NLPs within the academic community. Furthermore, implementing a standardized framework to evaluate pedagogical competencies would ensure that NLPs meet required teaching standards. This framework could be integrated into existing university performance reviews, allowing institutions to monitor and support the ongoing development of NLPs.

Finally, universities should encourage collaboration between NLPs and licensed educators through mentorship or peer-learning programs. These initiatives would encourage the sharing of pedagogical practices and insights, creating a more cohesive and integrated approach to teaching and learning within higher education institutions. Implementing these policy recommendations would address the identified gaps in NLP pedagogical training and contribute to enhancing the overall quality of education in Colombian universities. It is crucial to recognize that pedagogical competency is as important as disciplinary expertise and fostering this competency through structured and continuous training will ultimately improve student outcomes and educational quality.

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