

## University professors in the final phase of their careers: a case study in Chile

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Dec 29, 2023

Revised Jul 4, 2024

Accepted Aug 28, 2024

#### Keywords:

Didactic

Knowledge

Pedagogical content knowledge

Teaching

University professors

### ABSTRACT

The article endeavors to analyze the career path of university professors in the latter stage of their profession and seeks to comprehend the methods of configuring and reconfiguring knowledge related to university instruction. It specifically focuses on professors who hold over 30 years of teaching experience in academia. The study utilized the interpretative paradigm and qualitative methodology, employing semi-structured interviews as the data collection technique. The sample comprised ten teachers and the interviews were conducted between September and November 2022. The findings revealed that university teaching relies on three fundamental aspects: pedagogical construction, affective-emotional aspects of teaching, and barriers to teaching in higher education. The study results offer diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that shape the higher education instructional environment, particularly regarding teaching approaches and methodologies. The research provides novel insights into the multifaceted components that define university pedagogy and the process of professors transitioning into retirement. It establishes a significant foundation for developing more efficacious and adaptable educational policies and practices in the dynamic realm of higher education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing transformation of education is triggering ongoing discussions on the role of teachers in contemporary society, and further, the responsibility of universities in training and preparing future educators [1], [2]. The literature indicates a necessity for teachers with greater professional competencies [3]–[5], as well as an increasing need for trainers who possess experience, knowledge, and effective management of teaching strategies that align with the complex challenges of tertiary education [6]. In this context, it is imperative to update and renew university teaching, particularly for those tasked with training future generations of teachers who must adapt to the complexities of society both present and future [7].

In the educational field, scholars discuss the necessity of designing spaces and situations for university professors to reflect on their practices, leading to reconfigurations of their pedagogical actions and the scope of their professional practice [8]–[10]. The university professor can effectively combine teaching, research, and environmental outreach in their professional practice, creating a distinct pedagogical-disciplinary knowledge base with strong theory-practice integration [11], [12]. Analyzing the retirement trajectories of university professors and their ongoing construction and reconstruction of knowledge throughout their professional careers is crucial for comprehending knowledge progression and its effect on teachers' teaching approaches.

Teaching is a multifaceted process that places significant demands on educators both early in their university careers and throughout their professional development. Achieving high standards of pedagogical and disciplinary character is vital for developing quality teaching [13]–[15]. On the other hand, it should be noted that there is a widespread agreement among academics that the primary role of university professors is to promote, strengthen, and encourage students' critical thinking abilities, self-determination, and lifelong learning. These issues have been recognized as the fundamental responsibilities of teaching in present-day universities [12]. In this line, it is crucial to consider the complex global formative process when co-constructing knowledge through pedagogical practices that prioritize the most constructivist perspective of university learning [16]–[18].

Various studies have examined the process of knowledge construction among teachers, including investigations [19]–[22]. These studies suggest that experience and pedagogical knowledge are consolidated through the exercise of teaching, resulting in a professional skillset that is refined over time. The importance of teaching as a profession cannot be overstated, as it requires a blend of both theoretical and practical knowledge to effectively impart information to students. In this context, teaching practice can be regarded as a moment of reflection during which teachers reframe their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs [23]. However, scholars [13], [24]–[26], among others, hold that teaching experience is an integral and essential aspect of professional expertise.

According to Perez-Cañado [27] and Ajani [13], university professors should possess behavioral and cognitive skills that facilitate the ability to evaluate, resolve conflicts, and analyze complex phenomena within the context of social and cultural diversity present in the 21st century. It is essential for professors to have specific knowledge of their discipline. Furthermore, these professors must be well versed in the hidden and curriculum in action components. Regarding the levels and components of professional knowledge in teaching [24], [25], proposes that this knowledge should be cultivated in four dimensions: psycho-pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of content, didactic knowledge of content, and knowledge of context. The task of university professors is to foster critical thinking in students, enabling the acquisition of new knowledge to engender doubt, questioning, and reflection. As a result, many teaching practices will require reevaluation to meet the demands of today's global and technological society [28].

This study sheds light on university teaching by examining it through the perspective of retired professors. Analyzing the professional trajectory of those who have taught for over 20 years, as demonstrated by Daumiller *et al.* [2], [29]–[31], provides insight into the development of pedagogical knowledge. By maintaining objectivity and using clear, logical, and formal language, we can better understand the processes involved in constructing pedagogical knowledge. The category of teaching trajectory helps professors nearing retirement articulate their diverse perceptions of university teaching [32], [33]. Through the trajectory they have built, we can analyze the significant experiences of their learning and professional development at the university. Emotional equilibrium is crucial for university faculty during the retirement process to avoid potential suffering and identity loss [34]. This stage holds various meanings and representations for academics [35], [36]. University professors face the challenge of reconciling teaching, research, extension, and management, leading to a contradiction between their role as educators and the requirements of academia [37], [38]. Analyzing the professional trajectory of university professors in the later stages of their careers enables us to comprehend the processes of configuring and reconfiguring knowledge about university instruction. Professional experiences define and construct teaching action, thus forming the work of university educators [39].

## 2. METHOD

The interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach were utilized to address the dynamic and complex issues that arise in educational research. Qualitative research is best suited to answer specific questions and is instrumental in comprehending the relationships between social actors and their context [40]–[42]. The interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodology enable the analysis of retired university professors' trajectories. This includes the process of constructing and reconstructing knowledge acquired during their professional careers. The use of objective assessments ensures unbiased results, allowing for precise exploration of these trajectories. It is essential that technical abbreviations are fully explained upon initial use and that high-level, standard language is consistently used throughout. Additionally, adherence to style guides and citation formatting further promotes a clear, concise, and logical structure. It is a case study [43]–[45], that thoroughly analyzes a specific experience. This research involved interviewing and analyzing the testimonies of teachers who have been actively engaged in university teaching for the past 30 years. Throughout their careers, these teachers have developed practices that are pertinent for novice teachers in constructing theoretical and practical knowledge. The case pertains to the Faculty of Education at a regional university situated in the southern-central region of Chile.

The study collected data from ten teachers through semi-structured interviews administered from September to November 2022. The interviews were terminated when including new narratives led to significant repetition, thereby applying the saturation criterion. The language utilized was formal and objective, avoiding

biased, emotional, figurative, or ornamental language. The writing adhered to grammatical and punctuation rules of American English. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the N-Vivo 11 software through thematic content analysis. Technical terms were explained upon first use, and consistent citation and footnote formatting was maintained throughout the study. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the N-Vivo 11 software through thematic content analysis. No subjective evaluations were included in the analysis.

The study's inclusion criteria comprised voluntary acceptance via signed informed consent forms, full-time professorship at the institution under investigation, fulfillment of teaching obligations, absence of medical leave or postgraduate studies, and being over 60 years old. The exclusion criteria stipulated that professor under 60 years old, part-time faculty, or institution guests were not considered in the study. The project received approval from the Ethics Committee at the researchers' institution via minute N° 116/2022. A semi-structured interview was conducted in accordance with Miles *et al.* [46], utilizing a pre-established protocol comprising queries regarding teacher education, such as motives for pursuing this career, encountered challenges and advantages, aspects of an outstanding teacher, contentment levels with teaching at the university, as well as the process of constructing pedagogical and professional expertise over the course of one's career.

The researchers utilized content analysis [47]–[49], which included pre-analysis, material exploration, results processing, and interpretation. They employed objective evaluations throughout the analysis and provided explanations for technical terms upon their first usage. The researchers maintained consistent formatting and citation and utilized precise technical vocabulary. To avoid biases, hedging was employed, and the language remained formal and grammatically correct. In the pre-analysis stage, the researchers read through the data to gain greater familiarity and form initial impressions and hypotheses. In the second phase of material exploration, the researchers categorized questions of interest and reduced text to significant words and expressions that aligned with the study objectives. The large amount of material necessitated the creation of subcategories based on interviewee statements, representing thematic dependence in relation to the categorized theme. In the third stage of results and interpretation, inferences and possible explanations were produced, aligning with the previously established theoretical framework.

The study's teachers received a code consisting of the initial letter "P" followed by a non-sequential number to ensure their anonymity. "P3" designates the third interview of the teacher group. From the interviews conducted, the study identified the following categories of analysis associated with good teaching: the affective-emotional aspect of teaching and the barriers/obstacles faced in university teaching. The following Table 1 (see in Appendix) presents a concise overview of the themes and subthemes described above, along with a brief explanation of each and a participant's account.

The research results showed that retiring professors and academics have shared their accounts, indicating that their university teaching pedagogical knowledge is founded on three main aspects: pedagogical construction, affective-emotional aspects, and barriers to university teaching. Through data analysis, these three categories have been broken down into three subcategories each. The category of "Pedagogical Construction" specifically addresses aspects related to professional traits, the creation of pedagogical knowledge, and the development of professional expertise. Meanwhile, the category of "affective-emotional aspects of teaching" pertains to topics such as self-concept, the conditions for learning, and motivation. Finally, the category "barriers to teaching" differentiated between the effects of technology, uniformity in classroom knowledge, and the state of initial teacher education (ITE).

### 3. DISCUSSION

The literature suggests that the first category of pedagogical construction involves two spheres of knowledge, one passive and one reflective [50]. This construction is closely linked to the professional characteristics that teachers develop in the university teaching environment, as indicated by teacher narratives. This involves communicating information about the development and construction of pedagogical knowledge, including the distribution of content, didactic strategies, and teaching methods, as outlined in studies by Chan and Yung [19], Evans [9], Kedraka and Rotidi [51], and Neumann *et al.* [21]. However, this instructional design is associated with various scenarios common in university settings, such as managing internships, interacting with students, conducting research, and engaging in university outreach.

In [2], [23], emphasize the importance of implementing innovative teaching methods to address current challenges in academia. To prepare students for the real world, professors must adopt novel approaches that align with contemporary educational needs. Rather than focusing on outdated methods, educators must modify their teaching strategies and increase student engagement. The second category of teaching involves the emotional and affective aspects. According to research, emotions stimulate neural networks and strengthen synaptic connections, which promotes learning [52]. Thus, teachers must understand their own self-concept and their students' self-concept, as well as the classroom climate. Additionally, teachers must possess the motivation to continuously improve their teaching practices and expand their knowledge and skills [1], [10], [29]

Emotions play a significant role in teaching and student learning, as demonstrated in various studies [53]–[55]. Barni *et al.* [56] emphasized the importance of emotions, values, and ideals in the professional identity of university teachers. Teachers encounter a range of emotions at work, influenced by factors such as knowledge, attitudes, self-concept, self-esteem, and teaching context [57], [10]. This study's findings highlight the impact of emotional factors, like motivation, self-concept, and learning conditions, on educators' actions in the classroom, which in turn affect their effectiveness and overall satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize emotional well-being as part of professional development for educators.

A study by Bidabadi *et al.* [58] uncovered a third thematic category that focuses on the obstacles that hinder students' access to quality education. Retiring educators understand the significance of technology as a tool that today's students widely employ, leading to the need for continuous refinement of teaching methodologies. Senior educators must stay current with new knowledge and adapt to contemporary teaching methods. The study emphasizes the vital role technology plays in modern education. Retiring educators acknowledge that students heavily rely on technology to expand their knowledge, as indicated by multiple sources. This shift in educational paradigm presents a significant challenge for educators, mandating their continuous adaptation to contemporary teaching methods. As a result, educators nearing retirement are compelled to familiarize themselves with technology as a pedagogical instrument.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The current study presents a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the inherent complexities within university instruction and the shift towards retirement for educators in the academic realm. Its findings encompass a diverse array of perspectives, revealing the underlying obstacles, and prospects that delineate the landscape of higher education. Notably, the research underscores that the cultivation of knowledge is not solely reliant upon didactic methodologies and teaching approaches but is intricately entwined with various dimensions of university life, including coordination within secondary educational institutions, student interaction, research endeavors, and university outreach initiatives.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to acknowledge the dearth of institutional support pertaining to the pedagogical training of educators within higher education, indicative of a marginalization of pedagogy. In this regard, the study advocates for the implementation of institutional policies that actively promote the pedagogical training of educators. Specifically, emphasis should be placed on instructing the art of teaching itself, integrating training initiatives tailored to the pedagogical requirements of teaching. This approach seeks to valorize both the scientific-disciplinary production and the didactic-pedagogical aspects.

The research posits that the cultivation of emotionally adept educators capable of self-regulating their emotions is paramount in cultivating a conducive learning environment of high quality. Consequently, it underscores the significance of incorporating cognitive and affective dimensions within university instruction, fostering emotional awareness among educators to enhance their efficacy within the classroom. Moreover, educators nearing retirement acknowledge the imperative to adapt and remain abreast of technological advancements as pedagogical tools. The study underscores the necessity for educators in the twilight of their careers to conscientiously confront this technological challenge, adapting to this evolving educational paradigm to sustain their pedagogical proficiency.

This investigation elucidates a novel understanding of the intricate network of components defining higher education and the transition to retirement. This delineation serves as a substantial foundation for devising more efficacious and adaptable educational policies and practices within the dynamic context of higher education. Furthermore, it provides guidance for future research endeavors delving deeper into the intersection of pedagogical development, affective-emotional facets, and technological impediments in the trajectory of university educators.

#### APPENDIX

Table 1. Results of the analysis of the interviews with academics in relation to the megacategory “characteristics of good teaching”

Category	Subcategory	Description of the story	Interviewees' stories
Characteristics of good teaching	Pedagogical construction	The coding process unveiled the category ‘professional characteristics,’ where teachers explain their professional performance.	“I coordinated both internships in the career and kindergartens, so I had a lot on my plate. Dedicating time to tasks is challenging for me, as I tend to get focused on what I need to do.”
	Construction of pedagogical knowledge	The second category, ‘construction of pedagogical knowledge,’ emerges from the teaching characteristics category in the coding process, where teachers know how they deliver knowledge in the classroom.	“I will begin by discussing my perspective as a teacher, followed by the requirements of the system. I wish to emphasize that my focus is on imparting not just the subject matter, but also the teaching methodology and the skills development.”

Table 1. Results of the analysis of the interviews with academics in relation to the megacategory “characteristics of good teaching” (continue)

Category	Subcategory	Description of the story	Interviewees' stories
	Construction of professional knowledge	The third category, ‘construction of professional knowledge,’ emerges from the teaching characteristics coding process, revealing how teachers manage their work life and share their insights.	“The position I held was complex, as I often found myself empathizing with the professors’ discomfort. This discomfort stemmed from their unmet expectations, as they believed that their academic degrees would lead to better job opportunities. They realized that there was a logical progression to their careers, but it was not solely dependent on their individual achievements.”
Affective and emotional aspects of teaching	Self-concept	The coding process in the affective-emotional aspect of teaching reveals the category ‘self-concept,’ showcasing how teachers perceive themselves as educators.	“We’re looking for an excellent math teacher, and your resume confirms that you’re one. You’ve agreed that you’re a good math teacher.”
	Conditions for learning Motivation	Teachers report on necessary classroom environment for effective teaching. The subcategory ‘motivation to continue and learn’ emerges from the ‘teaching category conditions,’ describing the reasons for pursuing their profession.	“We foster a positive classroom environment to enhance students’ learning.” “A very effective didactic agreement, indeed. I must serve as the pied piper, captivating and inspiring students to study your subject.”
Barriers to education	Impact of technologies	The category ‘impact of technologies’ arises from the coding process in the category barriers to good teaching, as teachers mention how technologies influence their teaching.	“The need for training and a close relationship becomes apparent when we consider that we are constructing knowledge. As you mentioned, the networks now enable the students to learn, rather than just the teacher imparting knowledge.”
	Knowledge leveling in the classroom	The second category, ‘knowledge leveling in the classroom,’ arises from the coding process in the category of barriers to good teaching. Teachers highlight the unraveling situations they witness in their students.	“Implementing didactic knowledge and applying it to disciplinary knowledge can result in improved teaching and learning outcomes for both teachers and students. However, it is important to note that there are numerous factors that influence this process, and teaching and learning is a complex issue that involves sharing ideas and concepts.”
	Current situation of initial teacher training	Two categories emerged: ‘university-school link’ and ‘research-teaching link,’ resulting from the current IDF situation, with teachers discussing the human aspects of their profession.	“I came back, and I came back and started working in school from 1990 to 2008, and I worked in schools. I left half a day for the university and half a day for the school because, at the university, I worked part-time.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere gratitude to the celebratory export educators who contributed to the research, as well as to the faculty of education at Universidad Católica del Maule, Chile, for granting permission for the project to proceed.

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