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Challenges faced by teachers when guiding competitive learning in areas outside their field of expertise

Retos del profesorado al guiar aprendizajes competitivos en saberes distintos a su especialidad



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Abstract

This essay examines the challenges faced by university educators when teaching subjects outside their expertise, advocating for a competency-based approach that fosters critical thinking, autonomy, and problem-solving skills. It critiques traditional, behaviorist teaching models for stifling student creativity and proposes a transdisciplinary, humanistic framework integrating technology (e.g., artificial intelligence). The text emphasizes the need for adaptable, ethically grounded educators who create meaningful learning environments. Additionally, it addresses Venezuela's teacher shortage crisis, worsened by migration and poor working conditions, calling for policies to train non-specialist faculty. The author argues that true competitive teaching transcends technical knowledge, requiring reflective educators committed to holistic student development and societal transformation. Ultimately, the essay highlights the urgency of rethinking higher education to produce professionals capable of addressing complex global challenges.

Keywords: competency-based education, teacher adaptability transdisciplinary learning, educational crisis (Venezuela), critical pedagogy.

Resumen

El ensayo analiza los desafíos del profesorado al guiar aprendizajes en áreas fuera de su especialidad, destacando la necesidad de una enseñanza universitaria basada en competencias que fomente el pensamiento crítico, la autonomía y la resolución de problemas complejos. Critica los modelos tradicionales, conductistas y repetitivos, que limitan la creatividad estudiantil, y propone un enfoque transdisciplinario, humanista y ético, integrando tecnologías como la inteligencia artificial. Subraya la importancia de docentes con habilidades pedagógicas, vocación y adaptabilidad, capaces de crear entornos de aprendizaje significativo. Además, analiza la crisis de especialistas en Venezuela, exacerbada por migración docente y condiciones laborales adversas, exigiendo políticas de capacitación para suplir estas carencias. El texto concluye que la verdadera enseñanza competitiva trasciende lo técnico, requiriendo docentes reflexivos, comprometidos con la formación integral y la transformación social.

Palabras clave: Educación basada en competencias, adaptabilidad docente, aprendizaje transdisciplinario, crisis educativa (Venezuela), pedagogía crítica.

Challenges for educators in guiding competitive learning outside their core expertise

Contemporary university students demand competitive teaching approaches that foster self-discovery, awakening, and activation of their identity – including their skills, virtues, talents, capacities, ideas, potential, and thought processes developed through life and academic experiences. They require this competitive learning model to identify novel problem-solving approaches for daily tasks and to understand social, professional, political, economic, and cultural challenges.



Global, national, local, and institutional realities now demand transformative university education that enhances personal development as thinking, rational beings while preparing technically skilled professionals. We must move beyond traditional models toward critical reflection on teaching-learning processes that recognize students' competencies, skills, talents, aptitudes, and virtues.

Regarding this, [Zhizhko \(2017\)](#) states that at the university level, competency-based education demands that these competencies be articulated with experience. However, the task is not easy to achieve; it requires incorporating experience into the educational process itself without diminishing the student's way of seeing and explaining the world or realities.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight the need to promote this methodology because classrooms continue to show academically developing students working under an advising, mentoring, and guidance model that leads to developing an archaic, behaviorist, repetitive, and unproductive learning system; one that neither helps them think nor understand nor resolve situations required of university students. In other words, a discriminatory form of teaching is being developed, as it restricts students from producing knowledge from their own perspective, instead making them reproduce others' thinking, isolating them from critical, eclectic, and holistic knowledge.

In this sense, it is a priority to promote this methodological approach, given that classrooms still maintain advising and mentoring models based on archaic, behaviorist, repetitive, and unproductive learning schemes. These models do not foster reflection or understanding, let alone autonomous problem-solving. Consequently, they continue to promote limited and discriminatory teaching that inhibits students from producing knowledge from their own perspective, subjecting them to reproduce others' thinking and distancing them from critical, eclectic, and holistic knowledge.

In other words, it is necessary to materialize a university education focused on understanding what and how the student learns, so that they consolidate into a living resource, opportunity, or tool that serves all actors in the educational process, and so that the full development of everyone's capacities, gifts, potential, skills, competencies, and virtues is achieved, while simultaneously promoting a professional future that is competent to make decisions based on the achievements and aspirations of the very protagonist who seeks to develop it. In this way, as [Lora \(2020, p. 84\)](#) states, competencies should focus on "what one can do, what one knows how to do, and what one has the will to do (Being, Doing, Knowing-How)." Without neglecting what [Rodríguez \(2003, p. 82\)](#) pointed out: "to stay up to date on relevant topics and provide criteria for validating knowledge."

In this line of thought, a university professor with competitive qualities who teaches within their area of training expertise is required. Ideally, they should begin by manifesting themselves in doing, being, seeking, coexisting, and feeling as a competent professor. That is to say, they should promote, practice, and demonstrate competency-based teaching. This call has been made for several years. Thus, [Ortega y Gasset \(1976, p. 49\)](#) said: "...one should only teach what



can be taught; that is, what can be learned...". Here, the focus turns to the curriculum and the objectives that should be designed. But the matter goes further; attention must be paid to the human condition and its role in the earth homeland, as [Morin \(1999\)](#) affirms.

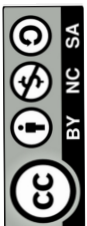
Many global challenges are occurring across various topics, phenomena, and events that emphasize, demand, and urgently require university teaching that truly prepares competent individuals who can understand, explain, and guide from their area and beyond regarding what is happening. It is necessary to educate and instruct without neglecting the ethical, environmental, technological, scientific, and psychological aspects, but above all without losing sight of the sense of the common good.

It is time for university professors to firmly assume the epistemological challenges they face, commit to their formative work, and develop the ability to express themselves with versatility on any topic, in a secure, reflective, critical, and profoundly human manner. Competency-based training for future professionals represents a valuable opportunity to also educate in values. It should not be forgotten that the university professor is the fundamental pillar in the processes of training, mentoring, advising, guidance, and instruction. Teaching to be competent is not reduced solely to the transmission of content or the fulfillment of curricular aspects defined by the academic profile; nor is it limited to analyzing an event or social phenomenon from a single perspective. Training in competencies demands putting the totality of the human being into action, which implies integrating cognitive processes, emotions, socialization, and experience as fundamental axes of meaningful learning.

It is a matter of *weltanschauung*, cosmovision or worldview to study reality from both an internal and external gaze (visible and non-visible), to seek new paradigms, to rethink a genuine understanding and explanation of the event that attracts the student's interest, concerns them or constitutes a challenge for the student. However, this is only achieved if the university professor makes their debut with agility, versatility and curricular eclecticism or interactive strategies such as debates, conversations or discussions in the classrooms.

From this perspective, one must not neglect techniques, methods, resources, learning contexts, or didactic strategies and new technologies like artificial intelligence; which implies re-examining epistemological, ontological, axiological theories and the critical and interpretative capacities of all participants in the process. Meanwhile, the more ideas emerge, the more knowledge is nourished and everyone's intelligence improves. We must leave aside that blind intelligence proposed by Morin.

To the extent that a university professor self-disciplines and projects themselves through their own interest to develop competency-based teaching without fearing the risks, challenges or demands of this approach, society, businesses, families and other institutions will have professionals capable of making proposals, taking initiatives, responding to individual or collective demands; there will also be dynamic, critical, autonomous professionals, emancipated from knowledge and managers of solutions to the problems of their entire environment.



For this reason, it is necessary for the professor to have attitudes, competencies and skills among which stand out, according to [Santiago and Fonseca \(2016, p. 193\)](#) "professionalism, discipline, responsibility, ethics, values or mental and emotional stability", [Freire \(2004\)](#) and [Dewey \(1998\)](#) mention that they should be stimulating and critical. For his part, [Escámez \(2013, p. 17\)](#) indicates that a competitive professor seeks the "creation of favorable environments for learning where their students achieve the highest levels of development".

However, truly competitive teaching is not limited to specialized or technical instruction. There are many teachers with this professional qualification who struggle to make others understand what they attempt to convey and demonstrate, and this is due to their daily expressed personal disposition or condition. What is needed is a good attitude, feeling, thinking, having vocation, researching, consulting, knowing how to evaluate, having experience, analyzing, and confronting theories.

It should be noted that truly competitive teaching is not confined to the specialized or technical. Even teachers with solid training in their discipline may face difficulties in effectively communicating and demonstrating their knowledge, often due to personal attitudes or unreflective practices. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate a proactive attitude, authentic vocation, critical thinking, and openness to dialogue between theories.

Likewise, it is crucial to integrate constant research, formative evaluation, and context analysis, as required by the competency-based approach to train emancipated professionals capable of solving complex problems. Only in this way can we overcome "blind intelligence" —warning as [Morin \(1999\)](#) does— and consolidate learning that, through ethics, self-discipline, and pedagogical creativity, transforms both the participants in the process and their environments.

To the extent that these conditions are understood and valued, university teaching will improve, and we will cease to rely on academic prestige that often produces rejection and academic isolation because there is no logical or reflective meaning to what is taught in universities.

A truly competitive teacher who sets challenges in teaching reflects that, whether a specialist or not, the importance of teaching for students lies in their actions, the role, the function, the contributions, the satisfaction of benefits, and the meaningful, constructive, humanistic, critical, eclectic, and holistic learning that it provides them to create or rethink new experiences, testimonies, and knowledge that are linked to their daily lives. Only then do they understand that they are moving beyond a traditional and receptive teaching approach to a competency-based approach that allows them to unite the qualitative with the quantitative in the same formative encounter, valuing their full multidimensional potential as a person and not merely as a simple student.

Of course, this new teaching stance urges the teacher to demonstrate greater commitment, responsibility, vocation, skills, abilities, and love for what they "do." That is to say, to be more self-taught, unprecedented, ingenious, motivational, humanistic—in short; to express a complex,



transdisciplinary, and global epistemology about what they teach to help them self-understand, discover, and recognize how the student learns most effectively in these times of universal change, whether through competencies or through the duplication of others' ideas and knowledge.

Indeed, it requires reflection to avoid ending up educating merely for learning's sake, or simply to fulfill the curricular objectives and goals of the teaching area being imparted. For the ideal is to ultimately offer society first and foremost a person of great humanity, and then a multidimensional professional - secure, versed, eclectic, and complex - capable of operating with autonomy and self-mastery, without imitating others' thoughts. [Rico and Ponce \(2022, p. 80\)](#) add regarding this that "competent teachers are capable of resolving diverse situations across different contexts, for which knowledge viewed from a purely conceptual or disciplinary perspective proves insufficient."

In this sense, a teacher with competitive particularities is one who manifests themselves - even without being an expert in their teaching area - as a tutor, companion, and guide from human, ethical, epistemological, social, cultural, empirical, scientific, and technical perspectives. Thus, they are the professional who expresses and acts as a complete whole in the development of both teaching and student learning.

This teacher explains, does, and evaluates both what they master and what they don't, without fear of making mistakes, because they reflect that from error can emerge a desire to seek knowledge to verify, demonstrate ignored realities, and improve concepts or skills previously lacking. For through trial and experimentation, one also learns and postulates new knowledge theories that emerge from doing, coexisting, and interpreting - becoming meaningful for the knowledge producer.

On the other hand, what matters in competency-based teaching is not whether the teacher specializes in the academic area they develop, nor whether they are an excellent learning process companion, nor a responsible tutor in achieving specific objectives within a curricular discipline. Hence, the fundamental challenge lies in understanding and considering what particular actions merit application, activation, and promotion so that students deploy or unveil the skills, abilities, capacities, virtues, and gifts that were underutilized at other study levels and that should become specific competencies to provide contextualized responses and meaning to analyzing concerns, questions, doubts, or curiosities emerging in the educational act.

However, it's necessary to mention that currently in Venezuela, regarding basic education teachers, as reported by the [Ministry of People's Power for Education \(2025\)](#), there is a deficit of fifteen thousand specialists. Likewise, Venezuelan universities are experiencing a teacher exodus as indicated by [Linarez and Linarez \(2019\)](#). According to the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(1999\)](#), there is a brain drain occurring. Parallel to this, teaching loads are being increased for teachers with different academic profiles, consequently facing greater challenges, questions, and criticisms of teaching praxis.



Certainly, the specialized teacher deficit won't diminish if the current salary and economic reality, treatment, and educational indoctrination persisting in universities continue - and this will lead to various studies and profound reviews of professionals wishing to remain engaged in the teaching process, so they may self-train, become aware, discipline, and align themselves with educational approaches that truly satisfy student needs and the world's intellectual demands - whether or not they are competent in what they guide.

Likewise, it is required that university authorities and the State reflect on this problem of professional deficit and mitigate specialized migration, or propose mechanisms that transcend to train, advise, and educate the non-specialized teacher, so that they become competent in what they teach. This is because some are struggling to meet the multidimensional and epistemological demands of today's students, or to continue demonstrating that academic and competent quality responds more to human principles than to the curricular fulfillment of a number of developed objectives.

There is recognition and concern even from the United Nations and competent entities regarding the teaching challenges faced by educators when guiding and directing non-specialized learning. Therefore, from our perspective, it is necessary to halt university-level teacher migration through national and international policies and to massively implement, through universities, training for non-specialist teachers that satisfies the technical needs not being received by students in training.

As final ideas of this essay, it must be noted that the obsolescence of traditional methods based on memorization is evident, as they nullify students' critical capacity. In response, it calls for applying a competency-based model that integrates knowing, doing, and being, articulating theory with real experience. This approach demands teachers who facilitate meaningful learning linked to social and professional problems, overcoming the mechanical reproduction of knowledge. The transition requires rethinking curricula and pedagogical practices toward autonomy and innovation.

It is also concluded that a competitive teacher is not limited to mastering content but combines professionalism, ethics, and socioemotional skills to guide multidimensional learning. Even without specialization, they must act as facilitators, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and adapting to diverse contexts. Their success lies in vocation, self-criticism, and the ability to learn alongside their students, transforming limitations into opportunities for collective growth.

In Venezuela, the teacher exodus and lack of specialists exacerbate educational challenges. Low salaries and precarious working conditions discourage the retention of qualified professionals. Public policies are urgently needed to halt this migration and train non-specialized teachers, ensuring educational quality. The solution is not merely technical but structural, requiring investment in continuous training and recognition of teaching work.

Modern teaching demands the incorporation of technologies (such as AI) and interactive stra-



tegies (debates, case studies) to develop analytical skills. According to Morin, this involves overcoming "blind intelligence" through holistic approaches that link knowledge with ethics and global context. The teacher must master digital tools and foster a critical worldview, preparing students for changing realities.

Finally, it is concluded that competitive training must prioritize values such as the common good, empathy, and social responsibility. Freire and Dewey emphasize that the teacher should be a critical stimulator, not a mere transmitter of information. This implies balancing the technical with the human, training professionals who solve problems from a comprehensive, ethical, and emancipatory perspective, transcending traditional curricular demands.

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