

# Contemporary challenges in teaching: What is the situation like in Latin America?

Iván Leonardo Medina Alvarado  
Magíster en Administración de Empresas  
Universidad Santo Tomás  
Bogotá, Colombia  
Correo electrónico: [ivanmedina@ustadistancia.edu.co](mailto:ivanmedina@ustadistancia.edu.co)

Reception date: August 01, 2018  
Acceptance date: September 11, 2018

## How to cite this article:

Medina, A. (2019). Contemporary challenges in teaching: What is the situation like in Latin America? *Espiral, Revista de Docencia e Investigación*, 9(1), 195 - 204.

## Abstract

The situation experienced by education systems in Latin America and the entire world is the product of the results obtained from the management of educational policies and the contextualization of education for the development of the regions. For this reason, we describe below some aspects intended to identify the work of teachers in this set of changes that make education a fundamental pillar of contemporary society.

To understand the current dynamics the work of teachers is going through, this document presents three important challenges for teachers: a) Teacher participation in educational policies, analyzing the situation of some Latin American countries and their progress in terms of teacher ties in the public educational agenda, b) Academic training in teaching work: this challenge is consolidated as a key point in teacher qualification and we examine the objectivity of this training in the transforming function of education, and c) New competences in the teaching task, perhaps this situation is a common denominator that, with the passing of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been established as an answer to transform education from the classroom, taking into account the contexts in which the globalized world is moving forward.

Ultimately, the conclusions reached after these analyses are included, together with the bibliographical references that make this writing.

**Keywords:** teacher participation, teacher training, teacher competences, educational policies, education in Latin America, teachers.

## Introduction

The dynamics of the current world are experiencing changes of all kinds. For Gisbert, Esteve-González, and Lázaro (2019), education is not the exception. For this reason, an analysis is here presented constructed from the challenges that the work of the teacher is facing, from the changes that society is going through in the XXI century and how this situation is affecting both the work of the teacher in the classroom both positively and negatively and everything that the work of teachers in the Latin American context

Although it is true that the teaching work within an educational center and, in general, an educational system, concentrates much of the attention towards the administrative, pedagogical and curricular dynamics, Marcelo (2010) states that, in the same way, it is the context under which the interactions of the actors of an educational community are developed, that turn out to be points to consider that go beyond the borders of the classroom and converge in understanding among others things: the objectivity of public

educational policies, whose administration and management fall on the entire community, except that, unfortunately, the Latin American context denotes very little participation by teachers and educational agents who make education a key point of transformation, with precarious participation scenarios to jointly build plans, programs and projects that impact an educational community. Additionally, academic training in teachers denotes two perspectives: in first instance, academic training decontextualized with the teacher's work in the classroom and a possibly more complex second instance, in which there is no higher academic training, making it clear that both contexts are free will of the teacher, who ultimately is the one who decides or not to train academically and improve the skills that their work requires.

Now, from this intention to understand how the teaching work is carried out in the current globalized world, we seek to understand what are the new competences that the teacher must manage or make use of, generating the following questions: how are ICT information and communication technologies being used by teachers? How are research skills in teachers being strengthened? To what extent are new human relationships developing in the classroom? And how is education with relevance including the new tools that are not only present in the educational context, but in the daily routine of business, communications, care for the environment and the construction of new citizenships?

### Theoretical Framework

On the world stage, day-to-day changes are consolidating as the key situation for innovation and the promotion of creativity, becoming a starting point to intervene and adjust many of the tasks that humanity knows on a daily basis. This is how Vaillant and Marcelo (2015) propose that education has also experienced, is experiencing and will surely continue to

experience these types of situations in which change is the only sure thing, and from which, education will undoubtedly continue to be an important part of the development of countries and the entire world.

From this perspective, the role that each and every one of the members of an educational community has and that, at the same time, are part of the educational systems of each country, turns out to be more than important, since an educational system is the result of the interaction of multiple scenarios and actors who share the same purpose which, in the educational context, focuses on the collective construction of knowledge, the transformation of society in favor of equity and equality and, most importantly, favor the integral development of the human being, of these actors. The Master Plan (2015) establishes that the teacher is a transforming agent that is directly related to all members of the educational community, being a channel of interaction between managers and students, administrators and managers, students and administrators, and, in general, it is configured as a gear inside an educational center, this situation being the same when analyzed from the perspective of an entire educational system.

Since it is clear that the teacher is of utmost importance in an entire educational system, this document is built around identifying three situations or challenges in which the teacher must be recognized as a protagonist, making it clear that they are not the only challenges presented to teachers from their work, but they do try to cover the impact that the teaching work has on education. The challenges are:

- a) Teaching participation in educational policies.
- b) Academic training in teaching.
- c) New competences in the teaching work



## Teaching participation in educational policies

One of the most complex situations that a government must go through is achieving the participation of its teachers in processes that are not necessarily teaching or part of classroom practice, understanding these processes as the set of actions that configure and enable the implementation of the entire school system and the very functioning of the educational apparatus. Therefore, as mentioned by Lozano and Mercado (2011), in the Latin American environment it is an increasingly harsh reality, in which resistance by many teachers is evident by the little or no participation in collective settings where it is sought that, from the teacher's perspective, some of the situations of educational policies can be intervened, such as:

- Optimization of the educational system.
- Improvement and contextualization of the educational offer in the regions.
- Teaching career and teaching work

Thus, some of the following proposals are presented so that the teacher is considered an active participant in the educational agenda, regardless of the current educational level, the training they have and the intention they have to participate:

### 1. Formation of work tables

Work tables are understood as scenarios where they set the themes by which teachers are organized according to prior planning, and as Matute and Romo (2000) state, they aim to enable teachers from collective communication environments together with their classmates and under the supervision of some type of moderator, to discuss the complex situations that the educational system is going through. From these dynamics, teachers are expected to share their experiences generated in the classroom, from daily living and with a more critical view of reality that is often discussed by a board of directors or a session; on many occasions the dynamics that are built in the daily life of the teacher are not specifically known.

In order for the working groups to be consolidated as coherent and effective proposals to build solutions and not provoke adverse situations in which the results have dire consequences, Medina, Pérez, and Campos (2014), propose that these tables should be accompanied by expert professionals that moderate these sessions. Their responsibility should not be limited to accompanying each session, but rather to consolidate the information collected, so that it is organized and presented to the appropriate educational director. As complement, these working groups cannot be generated only from the local scene, but must be structured and planned from three perspectives: a) local work tables, b) regional work tables, and c) national work tables. Thus, the information collected is scaled to each subsequent work table and national governments can have first-hand information vital for interventions in educational systems and the permanent updating of public policies in education.

The interesting thing about this type of proposal is that the participation of the teacher is accompanied not only by their educational director, but is contextualized towards the realities that are often unknown in contexts such as rurality, precarious infrastructure, the limitation of resources, the cultural conditions and the same dynamics of the regions and the citizens. For Medina-Alvarado (2019), this situation in Latin America turns out to be a very important opportunity to take advantage of, given that, although some similar actions have been attempted, it is unfortunate that in some countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina teachers have grown tired of participating in this type of scenario, when their proposals have not been heard and have not been properly informed by the government why their proposals were not considered at the time of building or intervene in public educational policies.

Thus, it is proposed that the work tables in which teachers participate should not be discussion exercises isolated from the public agenda, and rather, as indicated by Barbosa (2004), it is sought that the consolidated information from these initiatives be the key element when debating the future of education from both Latin American governments and the entire world, making it clear that the teacher cannot be seen as an instrument of education and teaching as a profession cannot be instrumentalized, but rather the teacher must be looked at as an agent of change that proposes, articulates, discusses and enables educational policies to be carried out in the terms and contexts in which they have been planned.

## **2. Seek union participation in issues on the educational agenda**

In contexts such as Latin America, it is not unknown that the union force and the workers' unions are forces that summon many people and mobilize a large number of interests, so much so that Pruzzo (2002) says that governments come to agreements with these groups of workers to debate topics such as: workers' wages, working conditions, social security benefits, among others. This is why trade union educational groups are no exception and from the educational and governmental perspective, the importance and incidence of considering these forces in the decisions taken by governments is clear.

After understanding the importance of unions and unions in the education sector for the national dynamics of most Latin American governments, Torres (1998) proposes that union strength should not only be a movement in favor of improving working conditions, but be presented as a movement in favor of the entire educational reality of the countries. Thus, it is proposed that governments promote cooperation agreements and manage alliances so that the union force is not only synonymous



with labor movements, but is a source of non-imposing proposals, from which governments can feed interventions in education.

This proposal requires a very diplomatic and careful handling and, as Street (2003) mentions, these actions seek to widen the gaps in relations between governments and unions, but can become an important tool for the government with which iron out the rough edges that are commonly generated in the dialogues between both parties. Additionally, it can be a key element that teachers are listened to, have a collective force that encourages them to participate and be active protagonists of the change and interventions to educational systems.

### **3. Strengthen educational leadership**

Educational leadership is an important premise of the reality of any educational center since, from the capacity of the leadership that educational directors have with their educational community, goals are achieved jointly, making it clear that the fate of an educational institution, regardless of the educational level to which it belongs, is not only achieved by educational directors, but conjointly with those who are at their side.

For Samper, Sanuy, and Biscarri (1995), strengthening leadership in an educational institution favors the educational director to mobilize teachers and the educational community in general, all aimed at collective participation in which proposals can be contextualized in favor of changes in educational policies, taking as a premise the reality that is lived in classrooms and from the teaching work and their work.

This mobilization from the direction of an educational institution is not an easy task, and as Chiva-Bartoll and Gil-Gómez (2018) state, it must have persistence and clarity for the intention of the mobilization that is sought, where it is key that each member of an

educational community has clarity of their role, the contribution to the institution in which they participate and how their work contributes so that, as a whole, each teacher is a constant participant and their work is considered an indispensable task for the survival of an educational system.

### **Academic training in teaching**

When referring to academic training, reference is made to teacher qualification from both formal and non-formal academic growth, so that this training is configured in a more than important aspect of the teaching work, since, as explained by Asprelli (2012), from a constant teacher training, strategies, competences and abilities can be improved that day by day must be in accordance with the very behavior of society. In other words, the academic training of the teacher must account for the situations that are lived in society and develop educational processes of the 21st century.

In order for this academic training to be constant and guarantee that the teacher's work is optimal, the following is proposed:

#### **1. Contextualized educational offer**

The context in education is without a doubt a transcendental element of the success of an educational system or lack thereof, becoming known as the very purpose of education for the needs and problems that a population faces in its day to day. Thus, as Marcano and Urbay (2008) mention, the academic training of teachers must account for coherence between the needs of the students and the community in general and the offer to be selected by the teacher in their academic training plan.

This panorama for Cardelli and Duhalde (2002), puts in context two realities with which the teacher is possibly faced, such as: a) existence of educational offer according to what their work and realities require, and

b) wanting to train according to the needs of the population. Both are a reflection of what is being experienced in Latin America today, making it clear that in some populations the educational offer is limited to the economic viability of universities to offer training programs according to the needs of their environments, being a situation increasingly crude, in which some teachers must select for graduate academic training something that is not appropriate to their contexts, opting from among a limited educational offer that obeys interests of economic sustainability and the number of students by the Universities that offer such programs

Additionally, a problem that arises from this situation is present in the lack of teaching vocation, having as a result that many Latin American teachers have opted for this work as an easy route to occupy a place, and in public education this reality is very harsh, since, as Flores, González, and González (2008) make it known, it is very common to find teachers who receive their salary from the public purse but do not have the slightest sense of belonging to what this work means, a situation that leads to questioning and rethinking the mechanisms to enter the teaching career that have been established by the vast majority of Latin American countries

Based on this, it is proposed that the academic training of teachers, regardless of their relationship either in the public or private sector, denotes the following:

- Teacher training must be constant and at all times the teacher must be updating their knowledge, so that it cannot be claimed that collective knowledge training is based on the needs of the 20th century, with educational institutions that function as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- The educational offer of universities is in many cases the only offer available for teaching qualification, but is also clear to find that tailored education is generated when the same educational systems identify needs to be addressed, and based on this, they request the opening of educational programs that respond to the needs of the educational system itself.

This panorama invites us to generate an important intervention in the educational planning and in the characterization of the populations, so that, jointly, universities, educational centers and teachers can work to propose solutions to these unattended problems and guarantee the educational offer contextualized from the work of the teacher towards their communities.

## **2. Career plan determined by constant academic training**

In contexts such as Latin America, it is common to find situations in which teachers build for themselves an accelerated career plan in which, unfortunately, a single intention for growth is demonstrated aligned with salary improvement. As mentioned by Rivas, Veleda, and Mezzadra (2013), this situation is presented by the permissiveness of many educational systems, which have not been updated and vehemently intervened in the growth of the teaching career plan, a situation that ratifies that in many cases the administrative functioning of educational centers and the educational systems themselves seem to be working with policies and guidelines of two centuries ago.

For this, it is possible to identify, according to Cardelli and Duhalde (2002), those who mention that graduate training at doctoral and master's level is in many cases not consistent with research production by both those who are training and being trained, being a clear example of graduate training that has been taken upon as a requirement to go up the

so-called teaching ladder, but does not give results. The educational level achieved is alienated with research production.

Thus, it is proposed that the teaching career plan, regardless of the level of training, should be aligned consistently with academic training, with training being a requirement to take part of and continue to be so afterwards. Thus, whoever enters the teaching career cannot only keep a graduate program in their resume, additionally they must continuously demonstrate academic production, generated properly from their work as the fruit of their contribution to society and as the result of their vocation.

The teaching career plan, for Díaz, Blázquez, and Casse (2007), must be constantly presenting the teacher with an educational offer that contributes to their work, favoring the breakdown of comfort zones in which many teachers have fallen over time. Additionally, it should be made clear that the accumulation of degrees is not sought, but the updating of knowledge, improvement of skills and acquisition of new skills, which are built and measured as teachers grow in the workplace and optimize their work.

### **New competences in the teaching work**

The work of the 19th century teacher has surely undergone changes when compared to the work of 20th and 21st century ones, which leads to questioning the skills with which many teachers are carrying out their work, and precisely from the Latin American perspective, as indicated by Oliveira, Gonçalves, and Melo (2004), this situation presents great challenges, which –if they are not properly addressed- will generate a gap that will widen day by day that to segregate communities, isolate populations and negatively impact educational systems without a doubt.

To understand what these new competences are, it is enough to observe the current world and the globalization of societies, whose intervention is clearly evident in this contemporary era, having as a challenge for teachers to expand their knowledge on topics such as:

- **Information and Communication Technologies**

The so-called ICT are not only present in communications and business, they have also come to stay in educational processes and the future of current educational processes will surely depend, in the short and long run, largely on how we interact with these technologies, to which Rueda (2013) mentions that this presents a number of possibilities to improve and optimize the current actions of teachers, except that in contexts such as twenty-first-century Latin America, the concept of digital illiteracy is still present in a large part of its teachers at all educational levels, from preschool and initial education, through primary, middle, high school and the entire set of levels of higher education.

The challenge that the educational systems assume is great, especially when it is clear that it is not possible to change the entire teaching payroll that does not have this knowledge in ICT, but that it is possible to generate teacher updating programs that enable teacher qualification in these topics, and seek permanent updating of teaching from the dynamics present in society today, ranging from technology, information, cyber-security, sustainability, to totally new concepts such as nano-medicine, biomedical engineering, among others.

Although ICTs present at the same time the concept of communication, this concept, on the part of the teacher, must be internalized not only as the communication process, but as the set of actions in which humanity is

communicating and exchanging information; for this reason, it is very necessary that the knowledge of new languages and cultures be acquired by teachers, who in summary are making education useful for social problems and continue to be the craft that materializes all professions.

- **The teacher facing research processes**

The Latin American teacher, unfortunately, as indicated by Fiorito (2009), is one with the least research participation on the world stage from an academic perspective, which cannot be unknown by the educational systems and does generate a huge panorama due to: a) teach the teacher to do research, so that later on, from their work, they have the skills to promote research in their students in the same way, b) favor that from their work they can investigate, c) find in research the answer to the needs presented to them in their environment, and d) make research useful by

being public and communicated to the global educational community.

The construction of a research culture from the teacher requires quite a bit of time, especially when the teacher has possibly not been part of a research community, which means that teaching has an outstanding added value from their work, in which there is the obligation to reinvent yourself and avoid monotony. Therefore, Palladino (1995) mentions that research in the classroom must be a fundamental pillar for teachers, who integrate their knowledge in favor of current problems and contributes possible solutions to these realities, making it clear that, first of all, they have the capacity to learn and detach or rather, update their knowledge for the new times.

- **Soft skills management**

In the contemporaneity through which humanity is going through, it is not unknown that some citizens share anecdotes in which





it is affirmed that humanity is going to be replaced by technology and that in the not-too-distant future, technology will dominate man; Goig-Martínez (2014) indicates that, in the face of this, human beings in recent years have found that their humanity itself is the one that will guarantee survival in the coming years. From this, education for the new generations and current generations necessarily requires to understand what soft skills are and how they will allow man to survive adversity.

In the Latin American context, soft skills possibly find a more docile environment to flourish with respect to the entire world, since the culture and unique aspects of the Latino community are largely based on some of these skills. They have always been present in everyday life, but, even so, it is necessary to acquire other skills that have not been cultivated in the same way, against this it is clear in the first instance that teachers acquire these skills so that they can build them collectively with their students and future generations can count on these in their human relationships. Soft skills that possibly should have greater prominence, are: a) assertive communication, b) teamwork, c) adaptation to change, d) decision-making, e) listening skills, and f) managing emotions.

## Conclusions

The world scenario is presenting multiple challenges to humanity. Teaching is no exception and this requires teachers to be constantly evaluating the pedagogical strategies used in the classroom, considering changes in the environment to enrich their curricular and academic activities. In the same way, it represents a challenge to governments who must seek the constant evaluation and optimization of educational public policies, so that together all of humanity cannot ignore the dynamics of the world.

From the teacher's perspective, it is more than necessary their participation in the construction of educational policies, generation of proposals to intervene in educational systems, construction of open debate environments to listen to the parties and, most importantly, be clear that the work of the teacher articulates within each education center and towards educational systems. Teachers have the utmost importance since they are the ones who enable the execution and materialization of the goals and objectives set by governments in educational terms.

It is relevant to mention that teachers must be constantly updating themselves and this update can be formal and non-formal, which means that it can come from graduate training to continuing education. The purpose is to contribute to improving the performance of educational institutions and systems, reiterating that the Latin American scenario cannot continue to present situations in which teachers perhaps only accumulate degrees to improve their working conditions, but that the academic training obtained at the same time presents measurable results and impacts communities.

Likewise, it is concluded that teachers must be strengthening new contemporary competences, which enable the work of the teacher and the teaching profession to have the relevance that today's society requires. Therefore, it cannot be accepted that the teaching profession is instrumentalized, since human beings cannot instrumentalize their own humanity. Teachers have been, are and will continue to be, in charge of directly contributing to the improvement of the performance of the new generations, to building a fairer and more equitable society, representing a challenge for those who become teachers, since the teaching profession integrates all of society and the future of civilizations falls upon this.

## References

- Asprelli, M. (2012). *Didactics in teacher training*. Santa Fe: Homo Sapiens Editions. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Barbosa, M. (2004). In the networks of the profession: re-signifying the teaching work. *Mexican Journal of Educational Research*, 159-181. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Cardelli, J., and Duhalde, M. (2002). *Research Didactics, An experience of teacher training*. Buenos Aires: Miño and Dávila. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Chiva-Bartoll, O., and Gil-Gómez, J. (2018). *University service-learning: models of intervention and research in initial teacher training*. Barcelona: Ediciones Octaedro, S.L. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Díaz, F., Blázquez, P., and Casse, J. (2007). *Model to self-evaluate teaching practice*. Madrid: Wolters Kluwer Spain. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- The Master Plan. (2015). *Participatory proposals for a new teaching profession*. Santiago de Chile: RIL editors. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Fiorito, M. (2009). *Teach, project, investigate: experiences and reflections of the teacher training career*. Buenos Aires: Nobuko Publishing House. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/15/2019)
- Flores, F., González, F., and González, A. (2008). *The competences that basic education teachers mobilize in their professional teaching performance*. Madrid: Complutense University of Madrid. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/15/2019)
- Gisbert, M., Esteve-González, V., and Lázaro, J. (2019). *How to approach the education of the future: Conceptualization, development and evaluation from the digital teaching competence?* Barcelona: Octaedro, S.L. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Goig-Martínez, R. (2014). *Teacher training in the digital society: research and innovation and teaching resources*. Madrid: UNED - National University of Distance Education. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Lozano, I., and Mercado, E. (2011). *The eye of the hurricane: the training and practice of the secondary school teacher: divergent views*. México D.F.: Díaz de Santos. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/15/2019)
- Marcano, L., and Urbay, M. (2008). *Teaching professional performance evaluation model as a way for professional development*. Havana City: Editorial Universitaria. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Marcelo, C. (2010). *Beginning teachers: insertion into teaching*. Barcelona: Octaedro, S.L. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Matute, E., and Romo, R. (2000). *Different perspectives on teacher training*. Guadalajara: Editorial of the University of Guadalajara. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Medina, A., Pérez, L., and Campos, B. (2014). *Preparation of plans and programs for teacher training in special didactics*. Madrid: UNED - National University of Distance Education. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/30/2019)
- Medina-Alvarado, I. (2019). Economics of education and teacher behavior in the Latin American labor market. *Caribbean Journal of Social Sciences*, 1-13. Retrieved from: <https://www.eumed.net/rev/caribe/2019/11/profesorado-mercado-laboral.html> (11/30/2019)
- Oliveira, D., Gonçalves, G., and Melo, S. (2004). *Changes in the organization of teaching work: Consequences for teachers*. *Mexican Journal of Educational Research*, 183-197. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (12/30/2019)
- Palladino, E. (1995). *Educational research and teacher training: research on teacher profile*. Buenos Aires: Space. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)
- Pruzzo, V. (2002). *Transformation of teacher training: from traditional practices to new assistantships*. Buenos Aires: Space. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (12/15/2019)
- Rivas, A., Veleza, C., and Mezzadra, F. (2013). *Pathways to education: bases, essences and ideas of educational policy*. Buenos Aires: Granica. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/30/2019)
- Rueda, M. (2013). *Educational evaluation: analysis of their practices*. México D.F.: Díaz de Santos. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (12/30/2019)
- Samper, L., Sanuy, J., and Biscarri, J. (1995). *Vertical mobility in the teaching career*. Lérida: Editions of the University of Lleida. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/30/2019)
- Street, S. (2003). Teaching work and teaching subjectivity: Old debates in new contexts. *Mexican Journal of Educational Research*, 599-602. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/15/2019)
- Torres, R. (1998). New teaching role. What training model and for what educational model? *Educational Profiles Journal*, 1-20. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (11/15/2019)
- Vaillant, D., and Marcelo, C. (2015). *The ABC and D of teacher training*. Madrid: Narcea editions. Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (10/30/2019)