

## The process of university teacher training in the Cuban context

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to characterize the university teacher training process in the Cuban context. For this purpose, a set of theoretical reflections about the referred process was carried out through the analysis-synthesis of the bibliography. An academic component is described, which fulfills an instructive function associated to the methodological work. A work component is valued, which marks the study-work link and fulfills an educational function that is evidenced in the teaching-methodological work. A research component is highlighted, whose developmental function distinguishes the scientific-methodological work. It was concluded that the integration of these three components allows the constant improvement of these professionals.

**Keywords:** Training; University professor; Higher education; Overcoming.

### Introduction

The socioeconomic model in which 21st century Higher Education is located is characterized by the abundance of information, the rapid expiration of knowledge, the

multiple interconnections and the circularity of an economy in continuous recycling. Each of these aspects implies a point of modulation in the training of university professors with the aim of facing and promoting, as never before, the successive changes that these phenomena cause in all social scenarios.

In this sense, the management of university teacher training in the current context constitutes a priority line of educational work. From 1971 to date, different resolutions and documents have been established that have led to the establishment of the bases for the development of this process and its consolidation.

In Cuban universities, methodological work is an element that optimizes the training of professionals needed by today's society; therefore, it is in line with contemporary approaches and trends in higher education. In this way, the social task that university centers have is fulfilled, so it is essential that the teacher is updated in the new approaches to educational work through constant, modern and permanent self-preparation for self-improvement (Guerra, Machado, & Espindola, 2021). In relation to the above, this article aims to characterize the training process of the university teacher in the Cuban context.

## **Development**

In pedagogy books there is consensus in affirming that the category teacher is part of the personological component of the teaching-learning process. It is used to identify the subject, institutionally responsible for the development of the student's education, from the instruction of the content of the subjects he/she teaches, to contribute to the formation of a general and integral culture and to an adequate ideological political preparation that responds to the ethical principles defended socially.

The concept of professor, from the legal point of view, is not exactly the same as that of university professor. Actually, the latter goes further, incorporating other aspects that enrich it and that are related to the training of the professional and his specialization. Therefore, this is not limited to a play on words, since the qualification "university professor" denotes a certain hierarchy for the organization of work, which is legally expressed in the teaching category of university professor.

In Latin American universities, there is an academic categorization for the teaching staff in exercise which, according to the country, is usually differentiated into three, four and even five different categories for which different requirements are established that increase the demands on the academic, methodological and scientific knowledge of the professor, as he/she reaches a higher level category. Generally speaking, similarities can be seen in the denomination of the various categories; however, they do not always coincide in their significance within the scales and levels, although as a regularity the highest level category is called full professor, which coincides with the Cuban nomenclature (Pozas, López, & Santacana, 2018).

In Cuba, the Regulations for the application of teaching categories in higher education, covered by Resolution 85/16, establishes three main categories: Full Professor, Assistant Professor and Assistant Professor; and contemplates the transitory teaching category: Instructor. Similarly, it recognizes a complementary teaching category: Technical Teaching Assistant; two special teaching categories: Emeritus Professor and Visiting Professor; and a special teaching status: Consulting Professor (Ministry of Higher Education (MES), 2016).

Among the general functions of all university professors, regardless of the specific functions for each teaching category, the following stand out: (a) educate students from the instruction of the content of the subjects, to contribute to their political, academic, professional, research training, and to the positive development of their personality, channeled in the ideological principles and moral values defended by the State and society as a whole; (b) must develop the work of counseling and methodological guidance in the preparation of their subjects; (c) prioritize self-improvement, as a fundamental element in the work of the department or chair, and contribute to the improvement of the other members; (d) direct or participate in research, development, innovation or university extension projects and attend to the introduction or generalization of the results in appropriate cases; and (e) publish research results and participate in scientific events (MES, 2016).

The fulfillment of these functions ensure the basic requirements to access each teaching category; and to maintain it over time, by passing the category ratification processes every five years, in which the evaluations of the university professor in the period are analyzed. These evaluations assess the results obtained in the following areas: educational teaching, ideological, political, methodological, research, improvement and extension work, as well as assigned academic management functions (MES, 2014). If

the university professor's teaching category is not ratified, he/she is demoted to a lower category. In the particular case of the Instructor, if after a maximum period of five years, he/she does not acquire the category of Assistant Professor, then he/she loses the right to continue as a university professor (MES, 2016).

The above makes it evident that the university professor, regardless of whether he/she has a basic pedagogical training or not, must be responsible for managing and maintaining an adequate pedagogical preparation and updating. This will allow him/her to demonstrate the scientific-technical development achieved in the branch of knowledge in which he/she has been categorized, and to work in a cohesive manner with the rest of the university professors to achieve common objectives in accordance with their functions.

In practice, it should be an aspiration of every university professor to move towards the highest level of hierarchical teaching categories. Individually, this is a direct part of the academic and professional prestige of the subject; and collectively, it obeys the internal organization of the university faculty in the set of academic, scientific and extension activities developed by the institution. At the same time, as can be seen in the Regulations of the higher education evaluation and accreditation system of the Republic of Cuba (National Accreditation Board [NAB], 2018), this has a social impact on the standards of quality and excellence stipulated for higher education, both nationally and internationally.

In a general sense, it is recognized that the formation of the university professor, as a process, denotes its complexity by being the responsibility of multiple agents of socialization. That is to say, it is influenced by levels, such as the general (the policies outlined by the Higher Education System, integrated by entities subordinated to the ministries of Higher Education, Public Health, Education and others); the particular (the institution, its board of directors and workers in constant interaction) and the singular (each subject with his life history, needs, motivations, interests, future projects, which have an individualized, personal and unrepeatable character). This is the reason that justifies the analysis of this process from other observation perspectives.

The first of these emphasizes that the formation of the university professor has an academic component. It begins from the moment in which the subject prepares to face, for the first time, the exercises established for obtaining the teaching category of lower hierarchical level. Then, with his incorporation to the university staff, he is inserted into the methodological work system of the department, faculty and institution, which,

according to García, Varela, and Espindola (2019) constitutes the prioritized line of pedagogical work in Cuban universities.

It is valid to note that in this research, by assuming the policies outlined by the Cuban Higher Education System, methodological work is conceived as: "the work that, supported by Didactics, is carried out by the subjects involved in the educational teaching process, with the purpose of achieving optimal results in this process, prioritizing the educational work from the instruction, to fully meet the objectives formulated in the study plans" (MES, 2018a, p. 651).

Therefore, the methodological work - in this training process - provides necessary tools to perfect the management and communication styles that should prevail from the teaching-learning process of the subjects. At the same time, it prepares the university professor in the mastery of the resolutions that govern higher education; and also, so that they can face with greater ease the exercises established for the promotion of teaching categories. This component, in essence, reveals the instructional function of university teacher training.

Linked to the above is a labor component, which is governed by a code of ethics for higher education workers and an internal disciplinary regulation specific to each institution. Both documents delimit the modes of behavior of all subjects involved in the institution, which in the case of the university professor, requires among other elements: exemplarity from their discipline, daily performance, ethics and sensitivity; as well as adequate ideological, academic and research political preparation (MES, 2014, 2016, 2016, 2018a). All this in order to have an adequate impact on the formation of socially useful subjects, committed to their reality and able to act on it, transform it and make it more humane.

The essence of this component is the link between study and work; and its manifestation becomes more explicit through the teaching-methodological work, understood as: "the activity that is carried out in order to continuously improve the teaching-educational process; based fundamentally on the didactic preparation that teachers possess, as well as on the accumulated experience [...]" (MES, 2018a, p. 667). In short, this component makes evident the educational function of university teacher education.

Similarly, in the referred training process, a research component interacts, which is identified with the scientific-methodological work of the university professor. It can be understood as: "the activity carried out by teachers in the field of didactics, in order to

improve the educational teaching process, developing research, or using the results of research carried out, which contribute to the comprehensive training of future professionals [...]" (MES, 2018a, p. 668).

The methodological scientific work of the university professor allows innovating and improving the educational practice. It connotes the integration of theory and practice and is developed in a collaborative and cooperative manner with the purpose of introducing changes in the teaching-learning process of the subjects and/or their curricula (MES, 2014, 2016, 2018a). In essence, this component manifests the developmental function of university teacher education.

Each of these components, in some way, is a carrier of the more general quality, which is university teacher education. They occur in an integrated manner, forming a dialectical triad that is only possible to establish a separation between them through a process of theoretical abstraction. However, in practice it may be the case that one of them, at certain times, may be connoted above the others, but in their interaction they always develop higher levels of training.

Cuban higher education prioritizes as a strategy for university teacher training, the comprehensive approach to improvement (MES, 2018a, 2018b; García, et al., 2019). This is conceived as a system where it is possible to identify subsystems of lower order, each of which has a new quality that distinguishes it as such.

When analyzing the specific characteristics of the integral approach to the university professor's improvement, the differentiated character of this process is considered. Reason that justifies the need to always start from the personalized diagnosis of each subject involved, its monitoring and adoption of effective measures that go beyond individual responsibility, in close coordination with all agencies and organizations that make up the working group (Martin, 2020).

In this regard, the policies outlined by the Cuban Higher Education System are precise in recognizing two essential elements within its basic principles. The first of these gives each manager of the entity the maximum responsibility for the preparation and improvement of his subordinates; he must answer for it as one of his main obligations. The second alerts that each subordinate - in this case, university professor - is responsible for his or her constant preparation and improvement (MES, 2018a, 2018b).

The norms and procedures for the management of postgraduate education in Cuba, which governs the training of university professors, specify various ways in which professional development can be organized. These are: the course, training, diploma,

specialized conference, seminar, workshop, scientific debate, consultation and self-preparation, as well as any other way that enables the study and dissemination of advances in knowledge, science, technology and art. Likewise, it specifies other forms of higher level of complexity such as specialization, master's degree and doctorate. And, it defines two modalities of dedication (full-time or part-time); determining that the degree of participation can be: distance, face-to-face or blended (MES, 2018b).

The comprehensive approach to the university teacher's improvement, as a whole, to ensure the achievement of its more general objectives, assumes, from the study of the theory of pedagogical direction, to develop certain knowledge, skills or competencies, specific to the area of knowledge to which the subject responds; and in correspondence, with the specific objectives of the subject of improvement as such. But, if it is aspired, as already said, that this training process, in addition to instructing the subject, educates, develops and prepares him politically and ideologically, then all the contents that are taught, in any of the forms in which the improvement is organized, must contribute to that objective, therefore, each subject that is addressed must assume, from its contents, purposes related to that work.

The above means that, in addition to incorporating elements of the logic of the science to which it is directed, the content of the training must take into account other fundamental influences for its design. One of them, derived from the training objectives of the professional model to which it responds. Another, derived from the educational strategy of the University. And a level of influence derived from the policies drawn up in response to the implementation of the guidelines established in the economic and social model of the Cuban State. These levels of influence, interacting as a system, allow working for the achievement of certain objectives, both instructional and educational, thus exceeding the scope of each particular subject and content.

In addition to the above, other levels of influences emerge that subsist thanks to the various groupings of subjects that converge in the process of improvement. Among them, the following stand out: those arising from the specific interests of the institution and its board of directors. Those that depend on the characterization of the group formed according to the type of training and those that originate from the interests of the subject in training.

In essence, the content of the constant improvement through which the university professor goes through has to contribute to the successful fulfillment and with the required quality of his functions in each of the organizational levels of the educational

teaching process; whether as a subject teacher, guide teacher or tutor, main teacher of the academic year, head of a methodological collective, or fulfilling administrative functions. It is valid to note that for the Cuban case, the Regulation of teaching and methodological work in higher education (MES, 2018a) identifies these levels with: the career collective; academic year; discipline and interdisciplinary (when necessary); and subject.

At each of these levels, university professors, must establish work networks that are strengthened in the collective, through collaboration and cooperation among its members. Likewise, they must work towards the achievement of common objectives that satisfy the social mission of the universities (Guerra, et al., 2021). In this sense, it is recognized that this is possible to achieve through the interaction of two important categories, which allow, at the same time, from a psycho-pedagogical perspective, to diagnose the development that each university professor has reached in terms of his or her training. These categories are: activity and communication.

When referring to the activity, we speak of a system that encompasses the participation and involvement of the university professor, both in teaching and research tasks, as well as those linked to the work activity and its professionalization. In addition, university extension activities are integrated to these, which may be of a cultural, sports, recreational, community outreach nature; or socio-political activities taking the professional model as a starting point, among many others (Espindola, Marín, & Mola, 2020).

In turn, and in dialectical unity with the activity, systematic communication is also essential, as it is the main way through which the subjects exchange information, express their opinions, feelings, transmit their moods. This communicative relationship must be based on open and flexible dialogue, as a subject-subject interactive process, based on mutual respect, understanding and empathy, as well as on the establishment of consistent and consistent limits, in order to help the university professor feel responsible for his or her training process.

## **Conclusions**



The training of the university professor reflects a complex, multifactorial and multidimensional social process that has as its most general purpose the pedagogical, methodological and scientific preparation of the subject; and the development of qualities and attitudes that allow him/her to perform responsibly in that profession. It is a process that must be efficiently directed or managed in terms of improvement; and for this, its didactic management must be planned and organized to execute and control the training actions.

It is recognized that this training process requires the cohesive work of all the subjects involved in it. So that each individual, with his discipline and dedication to work and improvement, conquers the respect of the labor collective, gaining in leadership and empathy. Seen in this way, it can be affirmed that the training process of the university professor, described here, emphasizes teamwork among its members for the adequate achievement of the objectives foreseen in each of the organizational levels of the teaching-educational process, since it allows to analyze in common problems that are frequent in the careers and to work together in their solution.