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What Competences Are Promoting in University Teacher Training Programs? A Study of Spanish Public Universities

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The aim of the study is to assess the extent to which university teacher training in Spain matches with the literature framework about teaching competencies in higher education. The absence of a generic definition of what it means to be a competent teacher and the need for a competency profile on which to base the study, leads to undertake an initial bibliometric review of the main educational research databases ERIC, PsycINFO and Psychology Database. The studies were selected to extract a categorical classification that allowed to code the content analysis of the training programs offered in 41 Spanish public universities in seven competencies: content-related competency (research), personal, pedagogical, social, communicative, digital and technological and ecological. 2425 training courses were coded and analyzed with Maxqda version 20.4.2 and Excel database. The findings show that university teachers receive more training in competencies related to technology, pedagogy, and disciplinary content-research, and less training in personal and ecological competencies. The conclusion of the study highlights the lack of consensus between literature review and programs on what constitutes good teaching among teachers and students and the fact that continuing professional development remains dependent on teacher initiative.

Keywords: university teacher competence, university teacher training, descriptive analysis, Spanish context, teacher training

INTRODUCTION

Teacher training and professional development for university professors have become a necessity, not only to improve their pedagogical competencies to meet the professional demands of their accreditation processes, but also for universities as institutions, demonstrating their potential to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive job market (Černak & Beljanski, 2021; Bouckaert, 2017; Palaniandy, 2017; Marentič Požarnik & Andreja Lavrič, 2015).

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Competency-based education places the student at the center of the learning process and uses competencies as a way to standardize knowledge and define professional profiles (Menke et al., 2018; Horokhivska, 2018; Cheong, 2017; Pekkarien & Hirso, 2016). But comparative studies show that the legislation of most European countries does not include mandatory university teacher training. In general, the acquisition of teaching competencies depends on universities taking the initiative to offer their staff training opportunities and on the willingness of faculty to participate in them (for studies on the situation in Spain, Croatia, Germany, Slovenia, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia, see Čižmešija et al., 2018; Corrêa et al., 2017; Abdulkhakiq & Ahmad, 2015).

In the United Kingdom, the need for a system of accreditation for teachers has led to the creation of ad hoc national agencies, such as the Professional Development Framework. In the Baltic states, Pakistan, South Africa and Malaysia, models of competent teaching are built on the basis of teachers' self-perceptions of their training needs (Pantić et al., 2011; Ullah et al., 2011; Palaniandy, 2017), while in Spain, Libya, Poland and Switzerland, competency models are based on student perceptions of how teachers should perform (Almarghani & Mijatović, 2017; Blašková et al., 2014; Rebisz et al., 2016; Moreno-Murcia et al., 2015).

In the case of European agency resources, such as the OECD's Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) project (Rychen & Salganik, 2003) are cited as key competences: interactive use of tools, interaction in heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously. In addition, The Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QFEHEA), the so-called "Dublin descriptors", the European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) point out the study of the theories, methods and practice of teaching a specific subject, the ability to understand and speak one or more languages, as well as to read and write in them, to use digital devices and applications, planning to organize, social and communication skills and life skills and competencies (Kazu &Demiralp, 2016; Marentič Požarnik & Andreja Lavrič, 2015).

In the United States, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) defines the level of competence in terms of commitment to the institution's values and beliefs and dedication to an inclusive and equitable approach focused on student learning. Likewise, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) uses five basic propositions as the basis for professional development: commitment to students and their learning, knowledge of the subject matter and how to teach it, responsibility for managing and monitoring student learning, thinking systematically about practice, and belonging to learning communities.

In the case of Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) constructs its competency standards in relation to three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement (Cheong, 2017)

The concern for competitiveness among both individuals and institutions is reflected in the mostly positivist model adopted by most studies. Thus, the behavior of teachers and students is evaluated in terms of their conformity to a predetermined set of competence

standards, whereby a competent teacher is assumed to produce good results and, consequently, good quality teaching (Horokhivska, 2018; Cheong, 2017; Abykanova et al., 2016).

The problem is that there is no single approach to the development of pedagogical competencies among university teachers. In this way, the bibliographic review carried out in this work shows different approaches to understand the development of pedagogical competencies. Pekkarien & Hirso (2016) distinguish between competence and competency. While the European tradition uses the term competence, the American tradition prefers the term competency. Competence according to the authors refers to the degree to which people manage to meet the standards that external institutions or organizations define as good professional performance and this is reflected in individual outcomes or behaviors (Bain, 2004). While competency refers to processes, to how it affects the worker's potential, knowledge, skills, motivations and self-perceptions, facilitating efficient and outstanding performance, including analysis and critical thinking.

Accordingly, the reference frameworks devised to classify competencies vary depending on whether we interpret competencies as the improvement obtained in teaching behavior after receiving a training course (competence) or in a broader sense that takes into account the specific requirements of the educational context (competency).

Kiffer & Tchibozo (2013) propose a competency model based on the acquisition, development and assessment of competencies in context, defining competency as 'the aptitude to mobilize in a relevant manner a set of appropriate resources in order to deal successfully with problem situations' (p. 279), therefore the concept of competency itself is highly situational (Visser-Wijnveen, et al., 2014; Kiffer & Tchibozo, 2013; Hollins, 2011). The teaching-learning processes in the university context, as in other levels, have a certain dose of unpredictability. That is, the profile of the student varies and with it their expectations, their motivation and the way in which they learn. Thus, depending on the context of the teaching practice, sometimes the university teacher will have to be a good communicator and, at other times, for example, a better manager of the organizational climate.

As institutions of training and knowledge creation, universities must face the challenge of educating their students in cross-professional teamwork, participation, decision-making, problem-solving, communication, etc. To do this, they must provide their teachers with the skills they need to improve their teaching practice in the context in which it takes place. Studies such as those by Visser-Wijnveen et al., 2014 show that the most motivated teachers prioritize the teaching process over the content to be taught, consequently, it is on the competencies related to the process where the search for a standardized profile should focus. As Francis (2005) observes, underlying the field and modality differences between them, university professors share a common core of explicit and systematically organized professional knowledge about their teaching role.

In recent years, the growth of online education (Foulger et al., 2017; Kebritchi et al., 2017), especially at third level, has led to an increase in scholarship on the question of

digital teaching competency. While some studies draw a distinction between the competency profile required for online as opposed to in-person education, with greater emphasis on the interaction between technology, pedagogy and content knowledge (TPACK) (Anderson et al., 2013). Others, such as Bigatel et at., (2012), argue that the competency profile does not vary across education types and that a teacher who is competent to teach in an in-person classroom is equally competent to teach online. In this regard, Bigatel et al., (2012) highlight the importance of active learning, leadership, charisma, motivation to teach, environment, technological competency and adherence to university policies.

Literature Review

As a first step to understand the competencies in which our teachers are trained, a competency profile on which to base our study is sought. To this end, a systematic review of the literature indexed in ERIC, PsycINFO and Psychology Database between 2009 and 2019. The literature review revealed six key areas of competency: content-related competency, personal competency, didactic competency, social competency, communicative competency and technological competency. Ecological competency is mentioned in only one of the studies surveyed, but has been included in the profile owing to its interest and importance from a social point of view (Table 1).

Table 1
Competence profile

COMPETENCY DOMAIN	INDICATORS
Content-related competency (research) Arzu Aydogan Y., Ilknur O & Seher Ş (2016) Barberá, E., Layne, L & Gunawardena, C.N (2014) Caena, F (2014) Davidovitch, N (2013) Long C.S:, Ibrahaim, Z., Kowang, T.O (2014) Mas Torrelló, O (2011) Mashinchi, A., Ahmad Hashemi, S.A & Khani, K. M (2017) NaliakaMukhale, P & Hong, Z (2017) Poekert, P., Alexandrou, A & Shannon, D (2016)	Knowledge of discipline
	Commitment to research (conferences, research gatherings, etc.)
	Research method
	Research innovation and creativity
	Transfer of knowledge into real-world contexts
	Creation of connections between research and teaching
	Interdisciplinary relations
Personal competency Abdulkhaliq, H.A y Ahmad, J.B (2016) Busler, J., Kirk, Cl., Keekey, J; Buskist, W (2017) Komos (2013) Lee, H.H., Kim, G.M.L & Chan, L.L (2015) Mashinchi, A., Ahmad Hasemi, S y Mohanimad, Klam, K (2017) Menke, D., Stuck, S & Ackerson, S (2018) Pekkarinen, V & Hirsto, L (2017) Rebisz, S., Tominska, E., Sikora, I. (2016) Üstünlüoğlu, E. (2016) Yürekli Kaynardag, A (2019)	Adaptability to change (open-mindedness)
	Ability to feel and experience emotions (authenticity)
	Positive self-perception (confidence)
	Intrinsic motivation for teaching
	Recognition of limitations (acceptance of criticism)
	Compliance with professional code of ethics (objectivity, inclusivity, tolerance and respect for privacy)
	Desire for self-improvement
	Sense of humour
	Patience
	Sound judgement
	Ability to reflect on role as teacher
Pedagogical competency Abdulkhaliq, H.A y Ahmad, J.B (2016) Almarghani, E.M., & Mijatović, I (2017). Bélanger, Ch. & Longden, B (2009)	Understanding of curriculum
	Design, methodologies, educational philosophy, assessment systems, etc.
	Understanding of students

Davidovitch, N (2013) Ergin, D.Y (2019) Lee, H.H., Kim, G.M.L & Chan, L.L (2015) Long C.S:, Ibrahaim, Z., Kowang, T.O (2014) Mas Torrelló, O (2011) Mashinchi, A., Ahmad Hasemi, S y Mohanimad, Klam, K (2017) Karimi, F.K (2014) Kruger, M. L (2009) Mehdinezhad, V (2012) Moreno Murcia, J.A., Silveira Torregosa, Y., y Belando Pedreño (2015) NaliakaMukhale, P & Hong, Z (2017) Pekkarien, V & Hirsto, L (2017) Rebisz, S., Tominska, E., Sikora, I. (2016) Reznik, S.D.,& Vdovina, O. A (2018). Ripoll-Núñez, K.J. et al. (2018) Robinson, T.E., Hope, W. C (2013) Şahin, M., Akbasli, S & Yanpar, T (2010) Tawalbeh, T. I., Ismail, N.M. (2014) Ullah et.al (2011) Wygal, D., Watty, K & Stout, D. E (2014)	Identify student needs
	Promote creativity, flexibility and versatility
	Provide feedback
	Engage students' attention
	Understanding of organisational aspects of teaching process
	Plan and organise teaching appropriately
	Create a climate of motivation
	Design environments conducive to creativity and critical thinking
	Pedagogical content knowledge
	Prepare classes
	Have a clear sense of the objectives to be achieved, taking into account the educational and professional standards demanded by the students
	Provide students with multiple ways to achieve their learning objectives
	Shape and establish lifelong habits of study
	Tailor methodologies to content and assessment systems
	Notify students of their results
	Answer students' questions
	Give students time and the chance to reflect on learning processes
	Create systematic records of lessons and strategies and their success (portfolio)
Social competency Caena, F (2014) Coffey, A & Lavery, S (2015) Gopal, A (2011) Güvendir, M. A (2014) Kruger, M. L (2009) Malik, K (2009) Mas Torrelló, O (2011) Pataraia N et al., (2014) Şahin, M., Akbasli, S & Yanpar, T (2010)	Teamwork
	Social interaction and cooperation with other colleagues and students
	Membership of and involvement in work-related networks
	Promotion of fairness and social inclusion
Communicative competency Barberá, E., Layne, L & Gunawardena, C.N (2014) Bélanger, Ch. & Longden, B (2009) Caena, F (2014) Mashinchi, A., Ahmad Hasemi, S y Mohanimad, Klam, K (2017) Monereo and Domínguez (2014) Şahin, M., Akbasli, S & Yanpar, T (2010) Slate, J. R et al. (2011)	Linguistic ability in mother tongue and foreign language(s)
	Friendly communication
	Organised, logical communication
	Avoidance of misunderstandings
	Ability to interpret verbal and non-verbal language in a group
Digital and technological competency Abdulkhaliq, H.A y Ahmad, J.B (2016) Anderson, A., Barham, N & Northcote, M (2013) Caena, F (2014) Foulger, Teresa., et. al (2017) Bigatel, P.M. et.al (2012) NaliakaMukhale, P & Hong, Z (2017) Şahin, M., Akbasli, S & Yanpar, T (2010) Spante, M., Sofkova Hashemi, S., Lundin, M & Anne Algers, A (2018) Mattar, D., El Khoury, R (2014).	Use of technology to identify training needs
	Use of technology to access, analyse, select, present and assess information
	Understanding and use of technology to carry out individual and group tasks
	Creation of networks
	Appropriate use of technology to select and present content
Ecological competency Shephard, K., Marco Rieckmann, M & Barth, M (2019)	Use of knowledge to analyse environmental issues and assess possible solutions
	Selection and use of environmentally friendly teaching materials

METHOD

The research question we have posed is to analyse the extent to which university teacher training in Spain aligns with the literature on teaching competencies in higher education. The analysis involved examining the contents of each course offered and categorizing them based on the competency classification indicators found in the literature review. This process consisted of six stages (Byrne, 2021):

- 1. Familiarisation with the data. Collecting the training programs of 41 Spanish public universities.
- 2. Generating initial codes and selecting the sample by including all public universities that offered training programs between 2018 and 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and where the necessary information was accessible through their websites.
- 3. Generating themes through reviewing the literature to identify the competency classification indicators used in the analysis.
- 4. Reviewing potential themes and analysing the contents of each course to determine the presence of the identified competency indicators.
- 5. Defining, naming theme and categorizing the courses based on the presence or absence of each competency indicator.
- 6. Producing the report, summarizing the results and presenting them in Table 2, which includes the breakdown of training programs by region and the total number of courses analyzed.

Additionally, the MAXQDA 20.4.2 software and Excel database programs were utilized for data analysis and coding purposes.

Table 2
Courses analysed

UNIVERSITY	REGION	Courses analysed
ALMERIA (UAL)	ANDALUSIA	79
CÁDIZ (UCA)	ANDALUSIA	70
CÓRDOBA (UCO)	ANDALUSIA	41
GRANADA (UGR)	ANDALUSIA	36
HUELVA	ANDALUSIA	85
JAEN (UJA)	ANDALUSIA	95
MÁLAGA (UMA)	ANDALUSIA	81
PABLO OLAVIDE (UPO)	ANDALUSIA	43
SEVILLA (USE).	ANDALUSIA	130

BURGOS (UBU)	CASTILE LEON	32
LEÓN (ULe)	CASTILE LEON	82
SALAMANCA (USA)	CASTILE LEON	106
VALLADOLID (UVa)	CASTILE LEON	69
AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID (UAM)	MADRID	21
ALCALA (UAH)	MADRID	62
CARLOS III (UC3M)	MADRID	33
COMPLUTENSE (UCM)	MADRID	78
POLITÉCNICA DE MADRID (UPM)	MADRID	50
ZARAGOZA (UNIZAR)	ARAGON	23
OVIEDO (UNIOVI)	ASTURIAS	23
CANTABRIA (UNICAN)	CANTABRIA	69
PALMAS DE G. CANARIA (ULPGC)	CANARY ISLANDS	44
LA LAGUNA (ULL)	CANARY ISLANDS	29
LA RIOJA	LA RIOJA	87
NAVARRA (UPNA)	NAVARRE	29
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA (UCLM)	CASTILE LA MANCHA	71
AUTÓNOMA DE BARCELONA (UAB)	CATALONIA	39
BARCELONA (UBA)	CATALONIA	122
POLITÉCNICA DE CATALUÑA (UPC)	CATALONIA	75
POMPEU FABRA (UPF)	CATALONIA	58
GIRONA (UdG)	CATALONIA	65
ROVIRA Y VIRGILI (URV)	CATALONIA	76
VALÈNCIA (UV)	VALENCIA	48
ALICANTE (UA)	VALENCIA	130
MURCIA (UMU)	MURCIA	53
PAÍS VASCO (UPV/EHU)	BASQUE COUNTRY	48
SANTIAGO (USC)	GALICIA	9
VIGO (UVI)	GALICIA	20
A CORUÑA (UDC)	GALICIA	20
I. BALEARS (UIB)	BALEARIC ISLANDS	42
EXTREMADURA (UEX)	EXTREMADURA	92

FINDINGS

Most of the universities studied were found to offer training for teachers through a variety of dedicated centres and services: Institute of Educational Science, Educational Training and Innovation Institute, Educational Research and Innovation Institute, Quality and Innovation Office, Training Office, Training School, Training and Professional Development Centre. The vast majority of the universities offer two types of training courses, depending on the teachers' level of experience: Initial Training, for teachers with less than five years of teaching experience, and Continuous Training, for those with five years of experience or more, are distinguishable in some universities, while others do not make such distinctions between training opportunities. In multi-campus universities, the same teacher training activities are repeated across all campuses, while others offer inter-institutional sharing of courses online. In most cases, mentoring and classroom observation programs complement specific training courses, particularly aimed at inexperienced teachers. Support plans for teaching innovation provide guidance and feedback to teachers on implementing their training. The majority of the universities were found to be receptive and responsive to the emerging training needs of their faculty.

The values obtained at the different frequencies in the competences analysed tell us that the most frequently taught competencies are content-related and technological ones. The results in relation to content-related competency show a clear bias towards teachers' research ability (searching for information, research methodology, knowledge transfer, dissemination, impact, etc.) and expertise in their own field, with aspects such as interdisciplinary relations or the relationship between research and teaching featuring to a much lesser extent.

The technological competency is usually understood in terms of teachers' ability to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their professional lives, both in their teaching and in their research and management activities. However, the TPACK (Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge) model, focused on the intersections and interactions between technology, pedagogy and content knowledge in educational contexts, is not developed enough. Notable in this regard is Shared Digital Campus of the non-profit 'Group 9' (G-9) network of public universities in Cantabria, Castile La Mancha, Extremadura, the Balearic Islands, La Rioja, Asturias, the Basque Country, Navarre and Aragon.

The third competence taught is pedagogical competency. The training programmes surveyed were found to focus largely on pedagogical content knowledge, particularly in relation to teaching methodologies, and pay much less attention to knowledge of the curriculum and organisational aspects of the teaching process. The game design and flipped classroom are the methodological strategies that are experiencing a greater impact in the Spanish university class-rooms.

The remaining four competencies in our profile were found to have a much more minor presence in the training programmes on offer. Communicative competency training was observed to focus largely on the teaching of foreign languages (especially English),

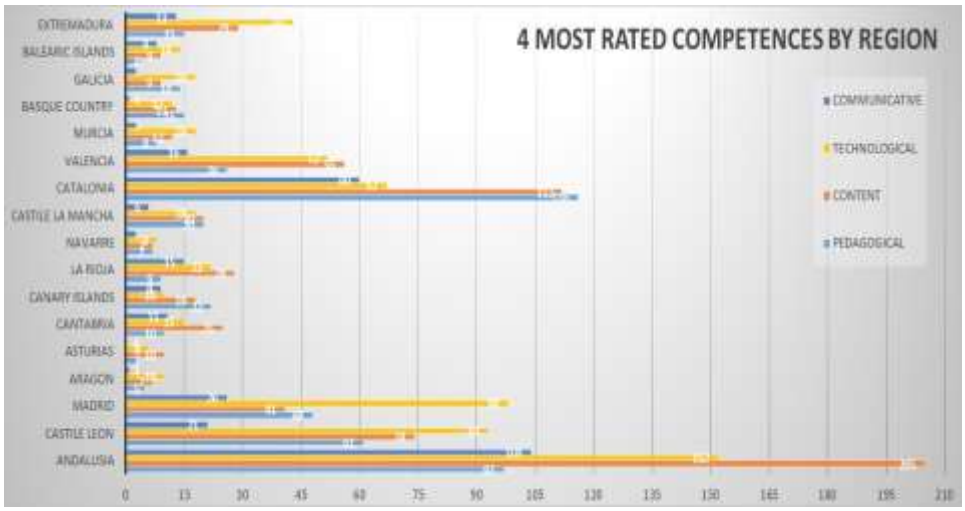
either as part of the university's own training programme or through a dedicated language centre facility. Much less attention is paid, however, to important skills such as non-verbal communication or clarity of communication and the avoidance of misunderstandings.

Personal competency ranks very low down on the list of training priorities in the programmes surveyed. Of the few courses offered, most relate to questions of health and safety (e.g. mindfulness, voice care, etc.), with very little emphasis on the emotional or motivational aspects of the teaching process.

Training opportunities in social competency tend to focus on inter- rather than intra-institutional relations, with little at-tempt from a training point of view to foster a culture of collaboration between teaching colleagues at the same university. Indeed, with the exception of mentoring programmes for new teachers, academic individualism remains the norm.

Beyond our own profile, it is interesting to note the appearance of new training opportunities in competencies related to teachers' professional careers (promotion, accreditation, years of service, etc.), and emergent competencies related to the 2030 Agenda goals of gender equality, environment and sustainability.

By developing a study considering the Spanish regions, it can be observed that, in Valencia, La Rioja, Cantabria, Andalusia and Asturias, the most taught competencies are related to content-research. Conversely, pedagogical competency plays a key role in Catalonia, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country (Graph 1).



Graph 1
Competences breakdown by region: the most rated

Regarding the competencies that are least developed in our universities, the results obtained from the study considering the different Spanish regions suggest that, in the vast majority of territories, the most taught is the personal competency. However, Extremadura, the Canary Islands and Madrid are more focused on the development of the social competency.

DISCUSSION

The fact that all the universities analyzed offer teacher support services through their teacher training and innovation programs illustrates the important shift in priorities that has occurred since the creation of the EHEA towards pedagogical teacher training. Despite this, in Spanish universities, training in research competence and technological competence are still considered the most important.

Moreover, the dominant frame of reference in the design of training programs is the competence model (Pekkarien & Hirso, 2016). The need for training programs based on specific contexts, along the lines proposed by Kiffer & Tchiboxo (2013) is still poorly implemented. Most of the training offered is still focused on expert-led courses on a predetermined set of competencies and the decision to participate in these programs depends on each teacher's own desire to improve. In turn, their importance for the teaching accreditation process has reduced participation in training to a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise (Horokhivska, 2018; Cheong, 2017; Bouckaert, 2017; Palaniandy, 2017).

The definition of what it means to be a "good university professor" needs to be revised in light of the results obtained with our study and those offered by others that have students as informants (Ripoll-Núñez et al. 2018; Belanger & Long-den, 2009; Miron & Mevorach, 2014; Üstünlüoglu, 2016; Bradley, S., Kirby, E & Madriaga, M, 2015; Al-Hattami, 2019). While Spanish universities prepare their faculty to be good researchers and technologically competent, students prioritize personal and social competence (Miron & Mevorach, 2014).

Although most universities conduct satisfaction surveys as part of their formative course review process, the descriptive nature of the study made it difficult to assess the effective transfer of knowledge acquired in their teaching practice. **In this sense, it is suggested** that complementary studies such as participant observation of their classes would help to know more precisely whether satisfaction levels are due to the potential of the courses to improve teaching or are explained by factors unrelated to this objective. In addition**, more studies are needed** to compare what the quality of teaching means to teachers and students in order to design a training offer that enhances the personal and social skills that are so highly valued in the aforementioned studies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the lack of a common definition for what constitutes ‘good’ university teaching, where the literature does agree is in its understanding of teaching excellence not as an innate quality, but as a continuous process of learning and improvement. It has been

observed that some of the studied competencies are addressed in teacher training in research and technology. Notwithstanding, a clear disconnection has been identified between the priorities of students and those of the programs, thus it would be advisable to study the implications for classroom practice.

However, the literature review shows that the legislation in most European countries does not include compulsory teacher training for university lecturers. In general, therefore, the acquisition of teaching competencies is dependent on universities taking the initiative to offer their staff appropriate training opportunities, and their staff being willing to engage in those opportunities. More research is needed to offer an appropriate training in which the university professor is the lead actor to improve the quality of university teaching.

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