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The Perverse Dynamics of University Career: A Narrative Analysis Based on the Personal and Professional Implications


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Abstract

We seek to describe some of the features and symptoms that define novice university teachers in their attempts to pursue a professional career at university. Presently, university culture revolves around the evaluation of professionals based on the quantity of work published in high-impact journals (“weight evaluations”). This situation not only has its effects at a personal level, but also on the quality of the education that teachers might wish to impart. Nine university teachers -five women and four men- with experience of between three and five years in different knowledge areas were interviewed to ascertain these symptoms. The results reflected the stress to which the new teachers are subjected, the implacable assessment programmes that are part and parcel of a professional university career, the distancing of good teaching in favour of demonstrable quality as an investigator and the possibility of suffering from teacher burnout syndrome no sooner than having commenced a professional career.

Keywords

Audit Culture, Higher Education, Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research, University Accreditation, Weight Assessment

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The Perverse Dynamics of University Career: A Narrative Analysis Based on the Personal and Professional Implications

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We seek to describe some of the features and symptoms that define novice university teachers in their attempts to pursue a professional career at university. Presently, university culture revolves around the evaluation of professionals based on the quantity of work published in high-impact journals (“weight evaluations”). This situation not only has its effects at a personal level, but also on the quality of the education that teachers might wish to impart. Nine university teachers -five women and four men- with experience of between three and five years in different knowledge areas were interviewed to ascertain these symptoms. The results reflected the stress to which the new teachers are subjected, the implacable assessment programmes that are part and parcel of a professional university career, the distancing of good teaching in favour of demonstrable quality as an investigator and the possibility of suffering from teacher burnout syndrome no sooner than having commenced a professional career. Keywords: Audit Culture, Higher Education, Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research, University Accreditation, Weight Assessment

We are at present immersed in a climate of evident pressure that has come to shape a university system which revolves around mercantile and economic interests, and is guided by a series of criteria or standards with which compliance is obligatory and that, in consequence, results in a university that is impregnated with a certain entrepreneurial atmosphere. No more needs to be done than to lend attention to the news on university systems, infused with terms such as productivity, improvement, quality, and excellence, each of which originates from the business world (e.g., González-Calvo, 2020; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018).

From our point of view, the underlying purpose of the technocratic discourse is none other than an interest in restricting the offer of these posts and their exclusivity that is espoused by the management of educational qualifications (Archer, 2008). Likewise, the arrival of evaluation -in terms of quality- in the university world, undeniably implies the application of techniques linked to the production of public goods and management techniques traditionally linked to the private business sector (e.g., Chiapello, 2017; De Lissovoy, 2013; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018).

The aims of this paper are to report the ways a cohort of nine university teachers navigate the multiple stressors associated with university culture. In this article, we first describe the theoretical framework used, focusing on the characteristics of neoliberal society, academic capitalism, uncertainty, and risk society. The next section explains our methodological decisions. In the findings and discussion section, we pursue a greater

understanding of the actants, the work and the processes involved in shaping expertise in the Spanish neoliberal university.

Literature Review

Risk, Uncertainty and Neoliberal University Rhetoric

The scope of education is complex and can be considered from very diverse points of view, all of which are nevertheless valid and necessary. As described above, present day universities increasingly exhibit attributes more traditionally associated with private-sector businesses. From our point of view, the *raison d'être* of this technocratic discourse is none other than an interest in restricting the offer of these posts and their exclusivity that is espoused by the management of educational qualifications (Archer, 2008; De Lissovoy, 2013). Likewise, the arrival of evaluation -in terms of quality- in the university world, undeniably implies the application of techniques linked to the production of public goods and management techniques traditionally linked to the private business sector (e.g., Chiapello, 2017; DeLissovoy, 2013; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018; Post et al. 2012). The functioning of universities, even enjoying (increasingly less) autonomy, therefore reflects a productive and mercantile model.

On the other hand, risk and uncertainty are characteristics of Western societies (Rose, 1999), and risk has become a prevalent idea within our lives. Risks are pervasive features of our own actions; they are present in all situations and can be reduced, but never completely extinguished (Bauman, 2013). Beck (1992) first described risk society: as an inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialization involving a hidden politics, ethics and morality. Contemporary societies are characterised by an increased incertitude about the future (Piotrowski & Ruitenberg, 2016). However, present-day uncertainties are “manufactured”; that is, they are created by the progression of human development, particularly by the advancement of science and technology (Giddens, 1999).

As Giddens (1999) claims, “[m]anufactured risk is expanding in most dimensions of human life... people have to take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements” (p. 4). In this way, uncertainty is considered as a way of life, and perhaps the only way of life available today; it is not something to “repair,” rather, something we “create” (Bauman, 2013).

Standing (2011) defines the “precariat” as a new class of worker whose work is dictated by increased labour market flexibility and insecurity and leads to “a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work or lifestyle” (p. 16). Nowadays, this concept of precariat is very common in university teachers in Spain, where teachers have to adapt themselves to different and precarious contexts and situations (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018).

Accreditation Processes in Spain

In general terms, accreditation refers to an evaluation process in which a person is identified and certified as possessing certain competences in relation to a qualification or certificate, regardless of how it was acquired (Centro Europeo para el Desarrollo de la Formación Profesional, CEDEFOP, 2002). It follows from that definition that evaluation and accreditation share certain common features. Nevertheless, while the first is usually internal, the second should be external, which is to say that the quality has to be demonstratable, which requires some type of external certification. Therefore, the reasoning behind the accreditation of quality in Higher Education is that by carrying out a positive evaluation of an institution or

program, it can be recognized as valid and reliable for society (Egido & Haug, 2006). In turn, Medina Fernández (2006) defined accreditation as the process of evaluation and, as such, a judgment that is given by a professional or set of professionals working in education, consisting in officially identifying, recognizing and certifying that a person has acquired certain learning outcomes [...], which accredits them with a general competence (p. 113). However, referring to the area of Higher Education, Organic Law 4/2007, of 12 April, in modification of Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December, of Universities (LOMLOU, 2007) establishes that access to the status of state-employed university teachers will require a previous award of a national accreditation that, assessing the merits and competences of the candidates, will guarantee quality in the selection of teachers (p. 16250). In a complementary way, Royal Decree 1312/2007, which establishes the national accreditation for access to the status of university teachers (BOE, 2007), explains that the end-purpose of accreditation is to obtain the corresponding certificate that, together with the possession of a doctoral qualification, constitutes the essential requirement to enter the competitive examinations for access to the ranks of state-employed university teacher. That certificate will be the guarantee of both the teaching and investigative quality of the holder. The *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y la Acreditación* (ANECA) [National Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation] and in 2002, in fulfilment of the content of Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December, on Universities (LOU, 2001), and that has as its primary objective:

To contribute through evaluation reports and others leading to certification and accreditation, to the measurement of the performance of public services in Higher Education in accordance with transparent procedures, objectives, and processes, and to reinforce its transparency and comparability as a means for promotion and for guaranteeing the quality of universities and their integration in the European Higher Education Area. (ANECA, 2013, p. 2)

As far as we know, in Spain there has been no research from a qualitative perspective on the personal and professional implications for lecturers in precarious situations of pursuing a professional career within the university. In this sense, the main objective of the article is to understand the empirical reality of the application of neoliberal policies in university teaching work in a local context such as Spain. A secondary goal is to better understand the way it is perceived and know the world, others and ourselves, our text employs a narrative methodology with the intention of generating a dialogue between professionals in the field of education and educational policy makers about the delicate situation that the university system is going through (González-Calvo, 2020; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018).

Context of the Study

We, the authors, as university professors and partial-time lecturers immersed in an academic system of an evident neoliberal nature, and subject to the economic uncertainty that has accompanied the university system in recent years, share the belief that a professional career within the university is becoming a real obstacle that is difficult to overcome. In this sense, we are interested in knowing the challenging circumstances that shape the personal and professional subjectivities of university teachers and their pedagogical practices. Knowing in depth the way in which university teachers (mainly those who work in precarious conditions) are forced to adapt their professional profiles to the requirements of the system will allow us to understand the clearly opposed fronts in the professionalization of teaching: the one that defends the profession as technification, bureaucracy, elitism, and social control; and the one

that understands it as an educational, contextualized, critical, and democratic profession that allows for progress in the development of a new professional culture.

In doing so, we contribute to establishing a debate that offers answers to the following questions: (1) what interests the university serves, as an institution, and what interests the science we do serves; (2) what our work in the university serves and who decides what it serves; (3) whether the work and research we do in the university serves to make life better; and, (4) what we should contribute to our students at a time when the Spanish university serves competitive, hierarchical and mercantilist interests.

Methodology

Type of Qualitative Inquiry

The present study was grounded in qualitative inquiry, and used a qualitative research methodology to answer the research questions. As Patton (2002) claims, qualitative methods allow the researcher to study in greater depth and detail issues within specific settings presented in our research. The present qualitative research, using semi-structured interviews, allowed us flexibility for probing questions to obtain more in depth and comprehensive data (e.g., Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010)

Participants

Five women and four men participated in this study, all university teachers in different areas (Pedagogy, Physical Education, Psychology, History, Physical Education, and Health Sciences), aged between 28 and 37 years old. Four of them are, at present, working part time in the university, while the other five are working full-time¹ (see table1). Purposeful sampling was used for the selection of the participants (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011) within a 200-km radius from the researchers' home base.

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Educational Stage	Status	Years of experience
Sara	Female	28	Pedagogy	Partial-time lecturer	4
Vanesa	Female	30	Arts	Partial-time lecturer	3
Lara	Female	33	Psychology	Lecturer	4
Nuria	Female	35	Psychology	Lecturer	5
Raquel	Female	37	Physical Education	Lecturer	4
Mario	Male	35	Health Sciences	Partial-time lecturer	5
Luis	Male	35	Physical Education	Partial-time lecturer	4
Álvaro	Male	36	Sociology	Lecturer	5
José	Male	37	History	Lecturer	5

¹ There are different types of teacher in the state-regulated system of Spanish universities, basically divided into those with permanent positions -tenured professor and professorial chairs-, and temporary positions -associate professor, doctoral assistant and contracted doctoral teacher-, the latter of an indefinite nature.

Data Collection

Data collection began shortly after the participants had agreed to participate in the study by signing a consent form. The data were collected in 8 semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 100 and 120 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

The start of the conversation centred on a number of questions which related to: (a) What is it like for you to be a new teacher and what issues do you face?; (b) What is your plan for developing a professional career within the university?; and, (c) What implications does wanting to make a career in the university have for your personal life?

The participants were asked to provide narratives involving their perceptions and experiences on: (a) being a novice university teacher; (b) how to develop a professional career at the university; and, (c) personal and professional implications of their career at the university. The interviewees chose the time and place for the interviews, to encourage free and open narratives on these topics and their anonymity was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms. Moreover, the interviews were carried out informally, in friendly conversations where the researchers acted as active listeners and gently prompted the participants to discuss detailed accounts on the purpose of the study (Smith, 2010). Besides taping the conversations, the first author took written notes on emergent themes that could, eventually, be followed up in the interview.

The themes that emerged from the various interviews were grouped around different categories: (a) the novice teacher; (b) the university career; (c) the university life; (d) the personal side; and, (e) the social and political dimension. These categories were grouped into three large blocks of results, each with different subtopics that facilitate understanding of the personal and professional factors faced by study participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in narrative terms (Riessman, 1993, 2008). The narrative analysis of the transcripts was conducted through the interpretation of *what was said* (see Riessman, 1993; Sparkes, 2005). Nevertheless, a qualitative software package (*Atlas.ti 6.0*) was used to assist with data management, in order to deal with the broad array of analytical possibilities that could emerge in the analysis (Smith, 2010; Sparkes, 2005). Initially, this led to the identification of the main categories or themes. Then, the researchers engaged in a second round of analysis through a process of constant comparison of the texts, in order to establish credible and reliable sub-themes in each category (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Afterwards, pertinent quotes were selected so as to illustrate these themes and sub-themes. Finally, all this information was once again compared and contrasted with relevant literature on the marketing of Higher Education, the proposals for quality and efficiency improvements in the Spanish university system, and university assessment and accreditation, in order to prepare the final results, discussion, and conclusions.

Some examples of the questions completed during the interview were: What does it mean to be a novice university teacher?; are you stimulated/animated by doing a better teaching job?; and can the university career be stimulating or is it possible to fall into “teacher burnout syndrome”?

Ethical Considerations

All ethical procedures required by the university were followed. Participants signed consent letters prior to participation and all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Results

The data analysis revealed three principal themes in relation to the professional university career for a novice teacher: (a) what conditions and demands are attached to the professional university career for the novel teacher; (b) university working life; and (c) personal aspects.

The Conditions and Demands of the Professional University Career for a Novice Teacher

Within this category, two sub-themes emerged: (a) why do I see myself as a novice teacher at university; and (b) what problems does the novice teacher face at university. *(a) Why do I see myself as a novice university teacher at university?* When asking participants whether they saw themselves as novice teachers, with the exception of the older teacher, the others did indeed see themselves as novices. The principal reason why they saw themselves in that way was the absence of any training to give classes at university, so they need the necessary condition of “agility” as a precursor to success in the neoliberal university context (Bauman, 2000):

I have to try to give class as well as possible, always to stay at 100%. Nobody has taught me how to give class at university, it is a self-taught process, and that is what characterizes me as a novice. (Luis)

The participants believe that the lack of preparation, the uncertainty and inexperience when facing classes is considered as a way of life (Bauman, 2013), something compensated by enthusiasm, considering that this quality is stronger among novice teachers than among teachers who have spent various years in the profession:

I think that one of the things that characterizes those of us who have not spent a lot of time here is enthusiasm, despite the difficulties that we face. Those of us who have been a little time here have more hopes than those who have been here all their life. (Raquel)

In addition to non-existent training, they mention another two reasons why they see themselves as novel that are the scant responsibilities of the posts that they occupy and the lack of prestige associated with their teaching post:

A colleague had just signed her contract as a contracted doctoral professor. Her post is much more stable than mine, she has greater responsibilities in a post that gives her greater insight into the way the university functions [...] If I had a more stable post, I would no longer see myself as a novice. (Nuria)

I do not believe that more or fewer years in the profession implies being more or less of a novice teacher. I think that what makes me a novice is the precarity of my post, where at any moment they can chuck me out, I have no other responsibility beyond teaching [...]. (Mario).

It has also to be considered that the status of a novice teacher is directly related with the precarity of the temporary post that they occupy, that leads to a precariat existence (Standing, 2011):

You are no longer a novice when you feel that you have a more or less safe job, when you have greater stability of employment, when you feel that your work is definitive. If I don't feel assured, only with difficulty will I consider myself an expert. (José)

Finally, there are also some who consider that you never stop being a novice teacher in a profession such as the university, which implies continuous training and being updated in relation to the academic content to be taught:

Being a novice never ever ends, I can see by myself that one never stops in this career. I don't know whether considering myself more assured with my teaching implies being less of a novice, but if that were so, there are other aspects in which you never stop being a novice: trying other methodologies, innovation, writing, publishing [...]. (Lara)

(b) What are the problems of the novice teacher at university? The principal problem that novice teachers face is precarity (Standing, 2011), having to live everyday with the implicit uncertainty of their complicated employment situation: "I invest a lot in this profession -from the emotional, personal, economic, point of view, etc.- aware that I have to continue investing every day and not forgetting that I am in a state of complete vulnerability" (Raquel). Likewise, being a novice teacher is clear from the self-imposed demand to comply with all of the (self-imposed) responsibilities and because of the fear of not being able to meet the expectations:

I demand a great deal from myself, I try to make up for all the aspects in which I feel weak -lack of experience, lack of mastery of the contents to teach - [...]. I am involved in everything that I do, I am always ready to improve and I don't tolerate my own weaknesses. (Vanessa)

Self-imposed demands make themselves felt as a result of the fear of thinking that they are not equal to what the profession expects from them:

What characterizes me most as a novice is fear. Fear of not knowing whether I'm doing well, whether I'm sufficiently well trained for the expectations that there are around a university teacher, if what I teach is adjusted to the expectations of the students [...]. (Luis)

When you have a certain degree of experience under your belt, you can apply other classroom strategies, you know how to motivate the student, how to improvise if the case arises [...]. I don't have that experience behind me, so I am scared that my mind will go blank, that I'll give nothing to the students, and so that doesn't happen, I do nothing else but study to try to take in everything. (Mario)

Occupational insecurity (the positions that they occupy are of a temporary nature) are associated with feelings of incompetence, of being somebody in passing) who is not really taken into account. In this sense, the concept of precariat shares some similarities with the well-known framework of "oppression" developed by Freire (1996).

I feel that I don't belong here, I'm not taken very seriously, it appears that the fact that I'm here today and perhaps gone tomorrow, because another person

with more merit will come to occupy my post, means that I'm always in the background. Worst of all is that, as the system's organized that way, if I'm now on the bottom rung of the ladder, in the future I'll be on the second to last rung [...]. Uncertainty, insecurity, that is what I feel, and I'll live it for years. (Raquel)

When we asked the teachers how they consider the situation of a novice teacher should be at university, they fundamentally spoke of two aspects: the need to create posts that can be permanently occupied, and a process of accompaniment throughout the first few years of the profession:

It is of little use to be flexible, to adapt yourself to the situation, to train, to be mentally strong and to persevere, if you know that they are not going to create a post so that you can occupy it and make it your work, your life. (Lara)

For these teachers, precarity is politically, socially and economically threatening, as it generates anger, anxiety and alienation (Standing, 2011).

Working Life at University

Within this category, the following sub-sections appear: (a) the role that teaching plays in the professional career; and (b) the “perverse dynamic” of working life at university.

(a) The role that teaching plays in the professional career. The university system is given over to a hegemonic model that conditions many of its educational practices and, in consequence, universities incorporate formulas, in their policies, to recompense and to stimulate scientific productivity among teaching staff (Chiapello, 2017). Among these formulas, the relevance of investigative as opposed to teaching tasks is found, which the novice teachers were quite clear about when embarking on their professional career: “The publication of investigations in high-impact journals, indexed in important data bases is the most important aspect to achieve stability at work, in order to gain a post” (Luis). The “didactic” and the teaching profile of university teaching is hardly cared for [...], teaching work that is well done is of little value within the university. “What counts is to have publications and to form part of a research group” (José).

The participants concur in their affirmation that giving classes well, staying up-to-date with the subject that they teach and complying with the demands of the teaching workload – class preparation, student tutoring, supervision of contents- is important, but takes up a lot of time and energy for the scant recognition that is obtained from it:

Day after day I ask myself if teaching is worth all the stress, the workload that it implies, in reading, correcting, up-dating, tutoring... At present, I'm not giving up on doing it as well as possible, although it is true that all that time is time that I am not dedicating to research, to writing, and to publishing, which is what they are really going to take into account to be able to work at university. (Raquel)

The imbalance -in terms of academic, economic and professional recognition- between the importance assigned to investigation and to teaching situates the university in a “unsustainable” model (Rué Domingo, 2004, p. 42), if this model is understood as a space for the cultural development of society. A situation that, in part, is justified in so far as unlike scientific and investigative production, it is not easy to measure teaching quality in the absence of international standards on who this has to be assessed (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal,

2018), which appears to affect researchers and/or teachers seeking to develop a professional careers at university. In this way, the participants considered that the system, as established, gave no incentives to do the teaching job well or to improve it, leading to an overload of bureaucracy that detracts from the time and the energy for dedicating to teaching:

An enormous number of articles have to be published, to pass the quality researcher criteria required by the evaluation agency, the majority of them of poor quality. [...] One aspect is that we should, as academics, share and transfer knowledge to society, and another different aspect is the topic of the *accumulation of papers*; papers that, on the other hand, not only reach society in general, but they hardly have any repercussions among the scientific community, as they are produced in industrial quantities. (Álvaro)

Likewise, and as established in Organic Law 11/1983 on University Reform, which has now been in force for over thirty years, university teachers are obliged to teach and to investigate, but it is only the second of these two tasks that entails an emolument to the salary in the payslip. An emolument that implies, for the first time in Spain, the self-evaluation of a group of state-sector teachers with its consequences for their salary. These evaluations, in the last instance, establish the frontier between good and bad teachers:

Teaching really counts for very little in this profession. You can give some amazing classes, be up to date with the subject matter that you teach that will, however, receive no recognition. What is essential is to publish because, you either publish, or you are left outside the system, with no chance of directing theses, forming part of the thesis tribunals, being able to accredit yourself in stable university posts ... (Nuria)

Such is the situation, it appears that scientific research is not done to advance, but to publish and thereby gain merits that will lead to improvements in employment at university (De Lissovoy, 2013).

(b) The “perverse dynamic” of working life at university. Pressure to publish has meant that publishing a paper is not the logical end of an investigation, but that it has been turned into an end in itself. In other words, it is no longer a question of honestly sharing the process and the results with the scientific community, but of publishing for the sake of publishing, without the content that is published being of great importance (Chiapello, 2017; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018; Pritchard, 2011). There are not too many real possibilities of following a university career with all these “obstacles”. In addition, publishing itself is not enough nowadays; publishing is something that any university teacher is supposed to do because of the mere fact of being a university teacher. Today, it is also necessary to be cited. Today, a university teacher who does not publish is, or is beginning to be inconceivable, depending on whether we are talking of Spanish universities or from other countries such as Anglo-Saxon or some Latin-American universities, (De Lissovoy, 2013). Not publishing and, increasingly, having no citations, implies -or will imply in a brief space of time- unappealable expulsion from the system (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018). “Publishing in this professional career has been turned into an end in itself” (Sara).

You pick up the enticing information from ANECA and look at what they ask from you: to publish in this database, in that other one... So, you leave everything that does not fit into that, everything that means you’d lose time [...].

You get “hooked on ISI” wishing to publish everything that the system demands of you. (José)

The present evaluation system of science is almost exclusively based on the tyranny of impact factors (Magnus, 2013), which inevitably leads to an unsupportable pressure to publish, which over recent years is increasingly stronger. In addition, this “tyranny” determines the direction of the investigations; what is and what is not deserving of publication:

It is shameful but that is the way things are, the system conditions my publication. But I have no alternative other than to think of the indicators and I am not doing it out of competitiveness. Only JCR or Scopus articles count towards progress. Other studies or indicators that can be used to evaluate a researcher are left by the wayside [...]. You either play by the rules of the system or you're left outside the system. You're another number. (Lara)

Added to this situation, in the opinion of the interviewees, the world of publications is becoming increasingly complicated and obscure, above all in the case of novice researchers who are trying to pursue a university career. Today, the mandate *Publish or perish* is more valid than ever, although publishing in itself is unfortunately not even enough. You have to publish in indexed journals in certain databases and within specific quartiles. And sharing in this complicated spiral, publishing is not even enough in itself: the assertion *Publish or perish* has changed into *Get cited or perish* (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018), which leads researchers to be irredeemably gobbled up by the black hole of scientific publications:

One difficulty with what you find is that you have to publish. But, increasingly, publishing implies paying money to do so. Taking into account the economic resources with which the novices at university have, that complicates it enormously. In addition, there is the fact that you have to consult past papers and, as it costs money, they're not available to you. (Sara)

In so much as publishing is an end -and not a means- in itself, novice teachers understand that the publications are “waste-paper basket publications,” investigations that are necessary to search for stability at university, but that nobody reads:

I read somethings that are published, above all to get ideas from topics that I'm interested in and to see how to write so that I'm published. But it's impossible to read everything, [...], publishing everything provokes a sort of fever, the madness of a delirium. (Nuria)

Besides, the current and growing importance of systems for the evaluation and the recognition of the merits of university teachers are developed with a view to achieving an accreditation capable of formally evincing the professional competences, regardless of how they were acquired (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018; Post et al., 2012):

The evaluation of teachers' investigations that is imposed and taxative leads to scientific fraud [...]. What I've seen more than anything at university is “scientific authorship,” publications that are handed as gifts to people who have not participated in the investigation, but who, in that way, continue adding to their curriculum and they'll return the favour later on. (Álvaro)

The evaluation policies of the university system can promote the acceptance of fraudulent attitudes towards market directives (Manzano & Andrés, 2007) as well as poor investigative praxis. Nevertheless, as the interviewees pointed out, it is essential that science opens its arms to ethics and *vice-versa*, developing not only ethical science, but also scientific ethics (Bunge, 1972). Were it not so, it is still important to distinguish between bad scientific conduct and scientific error (Drowatzky, 1993), and researchers that commit scientific fraud will have to face the corresponding academic sanctions in accordance with the type of fraud that is committed. It is not without reason that it is at university where people will be trained who will guide transformational processes from positions of power, in which a special and exemplary social responsibility is implicit (Boroto, 2004).

Citation circles are something that I hear about a lot these days. It appears that you not only have to publish, but you also have to be cited. And it is something that I see in the articles that I send to some journals; they reply to me saying well, OK, it can be published, but include citations from such and such an author and, above all, citations from the same journal to improve its impact, although they have no connection with the topic [...]. I don't usually listen to those suggestions; I prefer my work to be clean and not corrupted by those practices. (Luis)

Finally, the interviewees explained the need to form part of broader research groups that would allow them to open new perspectives and to learn together with others. Nevertheless, as they have reflected, it is complicated to form part of the groups, as the professional university career is a clearly competitive career where not everybody can win:

It is difficult to form part of the research groups, to get other people to open the doors [...]. I have asked to form part of some, and although they don't say so openly, I know they are reluctant, because there are other colleagues who also wish to follow a career at university, and there is no room for everybody; we're all a little bit rivals. (Mario)

In this sense, we believe that university neoliberalism foments an unrestrained belief in market values, radical individualism and unchecked competition, therefore discouraging notions of the public, solidarity and care for others (Giroux, 2014).

The Personal Vector

In this category, we find the following sub-topics: (a) definition of one's own identity; (b) risks and concerns linked to the profession; and (c) physical physiological consequences: novice and burnout?

(a) Definition of one's own identity. The identity of the teacher is not a question of belonging, but rather one of a set of needs, values, experiences, feelings, and skills that are formed throughout the personal and professional experience of each one, creating that sense of identity (Evelein, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 2008). The first years in the profession are the ones that progressively define pedagogic practice and identity, in which the teachers start to analyse, to examine, and to reflect on what they are doing and the way in which they do it.

They see you're young and that's a drawback because you have to be much more prepared or show or appear to be much more prepared than you might appear physically, because students very often see you as younger than them, in

fact I have been much younger than my students, which of course creates some rejection, doesn't it, but they do notice you much more, they analyse what you tell them much more, so you have to keep your distance a little more in certain ways. (Vanesa)

One of the problems to which the interviewees referred was the lack of time to carry out all the responsibilities that are expected of them in their profession:

Teaching takes up the most of my time in my day to day activities, so the time that I try to make the most of for research and writing is at the weekends and the holidays [...]. Over the past three years, I haven't been on holiday even once. (Lara)

As we have explained, scientific publications and other academic merits are turned into the "symbolic capital" of university novices (Bourdieu, 1986) who take up the model of *publish or perish*. They make it enormously difficult to be able to propose medium or long-term objectives other than to continue adding items to the curriculum and to see what happens. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the participants consider that they are "their curriculum vitae"; their true identity and their professional essence are marked by the weight that it has:

Explain the problem that implies having a "solid" curriculum for the university, but one that "is not solid" for other jobs." For example, I have to add merits to work at university but, if I want to work in another area, I have to reduce them because it's of no interest that I'm "over-qualified." (Sara)

It is important to point out that the interviewees consider that the process is different for a man rather than for a woman. Although the conditions for access, the requirements and the merits have no gender, women have to give up certain things that men have no reason to give up:

I see that there's a clear difference: the fact of asking whether or not you'll be a mother. I have just had a child and my career has ground to a halt. In the case of a man, I could have continued working, perhaps at a lower rate, but I would have continued along the same lines. (Vanesa)

Before I never saw the difference as much, I thought that it was a question of storing up merits and good enough. But now that I'm looking for stability, to form a family, I do see differences. If I set out to be a mother, the time that I spend on my work will not be the same, I'll physically tire myself out more, with the belief that the other people will continue to progress, but you'll lag behind. (Nuria)

This idea was shared by the male interviewees:

The professional career is unisex, there is not one entry point for men and another for women [...]. Although it's true that, in general, in the areas that I know best, there are more women than men, it's usually the men who have more stable positions, better working conditions [...]. The women, probably due to the fact that they're mothers, have stopped short their careers, in order to care for the family. (Álvaro)

Nowadays, as we can see, the idea prevails that having a baby in academia was that this would slow down, if not end, a woman's career. In this sense, universities must be more women and family friendly.

(b) Risks and concerns arising from the profession. Trying to follow a professional career at university demands a lot of time and effort, time that has to be deducted from other family and/or leisure activities. The necessary condition of "agility," as a precursor to success in the neoliberal world, echoes what Bauman (2000) termed "liquidity," a way to characterise the relationship that university teachers have with society today:

Although being able to be at university brings personal satisfaction -also as part of my own personal ego, as it is an area with prestige-, a very high toll has to be paid: giving up a lot of personal life, having problems with my partner, leaving other more stable jobs, economic loss, changes of city, having all your belongings in store because you haven't got a permanent residence... (Raquel).

The interviewees are unaware of how much time it will take to achieve employment stability, largely because of the impossibility of establishing professional projects in the medium-to-long term (Standing, 2011): "One doesn't sketch out a plan, I cannot decide if within ten years I am going to become a postholder at university. So, it doesn't make much sense to make plans" (Mario). One interviewee, for his part, did acknowledge having established a medium-to-long term professional career plan and, paradoxically, was described as an *ambitious* person:

I do have a plan, I designed it even before starting my thesis. My plan was to draft the thesis as a set of papers, so that when finishing it I would already have three or four articles published. My plan is now to publish, publish and publish and to form part of national and international projects to continue to win points [...]. When I talk of these plans to my colleagues, they always well me that I am very ambitious, in the negative sense of the word. But, how else, at my age, am I going to be able to follow a professional career? (José)

Another of the risks associated with the profession is the one that arises from the neoliberal system in which the university is immersed, considering the students as clients and the teachers as staff at the service of the client (Giroux, 2014; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018):

The point of teaching surveys is that the students evaluate you as a teacher, they're not much use, although they can be the difference between achieving an accreditation or not [...]. So, we try to keep the students happy, because the client is always right and they are our clients. (Lara)

Finally, the interviewees considered that a risk associated with the university accreditation processes and professional development is that they tend to detract from educational processes and move away from relevant questions:

We lose excessive amounts of time on various accreditation matters. It seems fine that they evaluate us throughout the career, but it appears to me that the levels have gone sky high [...] we now face excessive stress, hyper information that is not reasoned but obligatory. (Raquel)

(c) Physical and physiological consequences: novice or burnt-out? The society of over-production and over-performance is something that is by no means strange to the

interviewees. This society is characterized by *overabundance* (Han, 2015) that can lead to the syndrome of occupational wear or the syndrome of professional burnout (Watts & Robertson, 2011). The university today is not disciplinary, in a *Foucauldian* sense, but a university of performance, in which the teachers act as *slaves of overproduction* (Han, 2015). As paradoxical as it might appear, the interviewees show symptoms that are equatable with professional burnout (Watts & Robertson, 2011; Yavuz, 2009) even since the commencement of their profession:

No sooner that granting me the scholarship to complete the doctorate, my director told me that we would have to publish two or three articles a month. It caused me a lot of anxiety to see myself under the obligation of having to gain merits as soon as possible, above all taking into account that I had just started in research, that I didn't really know very well how I had to do it ... That situation of constant pressure was stressful for me, I think that I could, over time, come to feel burnout with the profession. (Sara)

The criteria that the evaluation agency establishes, essential to be able to achieve employment stability at university, are a source of stress and ill-feeling among novice teachers. These requirements are neither necessarily shared by the teachers, nor do they have decision-making capacity over them, which leads to low motivation among the interviewees:

If you follow the criteria established by ANECA and that are in force in the universities when the posts are advertised, everything is suddenly very little. If you have published you still need to do stays in other universities. If you have done stays at other Spanish universities, those don't score, you have to go abroad, go to the United Kingdom, to the United States, although whatever you do there you can do in your own country. When you meet those requirements, the bar is raised again, in such a way that you never arrive at the finishing post. That is wearing, that is burnout. (Álvaro)

As some of the participants affirmed, this early fatigue with the profession will in the short term neither favour the teaching/learning process of the students nor implication in the profession:

Teaching at university attracts me, but it is true that I am increasingly tired. The difficulties over accreditation, added to the scarcity of posts and being able to progress within university are two factors that cause immense professional wear and that I think, with the passing of the years, is impacting negatively on the quality of my classes. (Raquel)

In this professional field, the interviewees appear to share the feeling that they will never reach a definitive objective. It is not that they wish to achieve those objectives but, rather more, that they are unable to establish a plan to reach them definitively, due to the changing and increasingly demanding nature of the university system. The imperative to perform forces it to contribute ever greater performance; in this way, they never reach a gratifying resting point where the individuals who are obliged to perform destroy themselves through a process of self-realization (Han, 2015).

Discussion

A series of conditions (quality, excellence, investigative accreditation, evaluation based on competitive criteria, among others) are demanded from the university professor, as has been threshed out throughout this paper, which are contradictory with what, at the same time, continue to appear in political discourse, perhaps because of questions of social desirability, such as the formation of critical and socially responsible citizens, offering an education in favour of equal opportunities, equity and quality of teaching for all students, and other similar expectations.

The current system, that is guided in accordance with the norms established in Organic Law 4/2007 in Spain, has as its main advantage greater objectivity in the selection of university teachers as well as the stimulation of its investigative activity (LOMLOU, 2007). Thanks to that system, a need exists to meet some quality and evaluation criteria of the whole university system and, even more so, in a certain way the “endogamic inheritance” (Buela-Casal, 2007, p. 477) and the contracting and promotion of staff that belong to the same institution. On that point, as is explained in article 56 of Organic Law 4/2007, “the Government [...] will regulate the accreditation procedure [...] in order to guarantee effective, efficient, transparent, and objective selection of the teaching staff” (LOMLOU, 2007, p. 16250).

Despite these advantages, it is not an ideal system. Seeking to play this evaluative and accreditive role through the imposition of timeframes, in a mechanistic manner and in accordance with a technical model of rationality that seeks a series of formal objectives hardly appears to be the best road to follow. This evaluative culture can therefore be understood as a concession that is made to neoliberalism that cements our present-day society. Even with the knowledge that an efficient and quality system of university education is closely linked to the rendering of accounts, by the teaching staff, on their teaching and investigative practice and which, at the same time, is endorsed by a serious and independent institution, it is no less true that these types of measures create a functional regime based not on the solvency of the educator but, rather more, on the threat of banishment, loss of status, and punishment.

On the contrary, an optimal scenario to achieve quality throughout the university system can be instituted, employing a model that is founded on the principle of university autonomy, on the formal recognition of the effort of the agents involved in the quality of the institution, on the timely and necessary assignment of resources, on the rendering of accounts in accordance with a balance between both the investigative and the teaching role and based on the concepts of democracy, criticism, and socialization (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018).

On this point, it is important to turn the evaluation process of the teacher into a real system that serves to detect needs for improvement and to adopt the most consequential decisions to solve them. In other words, the evaluation of the teacher will have to have “a close relation with teacher training policies, with support for innovation, with the financing of departments..., but also and in a very special way with the processes of selection and promotion of academic staff” (Parcerisa, 2006, p. 15), seeking to place teaching at the same level as investigation and offering the material and economic resources that are necessary to be able to guarantee a productive and efficient system in all of its dimensions.

Such as it is, is it possible to reach that educational and investigative quality of which so much is said? Can teaching and investigation of greater quality be demanded from teaching staff alongside regulatory policies in terms of the (economic, human, and material) resources that support them? Were the responses affirmative, it would then be worth asking the following question. What has up until now been happening in universities, for them not to be able to achieve better results, with more resources than they have at present?

But, were the response negative, then the question should be focused on discovering what role Universities and the teachers who work in them seek to play in present-day society.

Besides, although the evaluation systems of the university system can promote the adoption of fraudulent attitudes towards the directives of the market as well as bad investigative praxis (in part due to ambition and professional avarice of university professors), it is essential for science to embrace ethics and vice-versa, developing not only ethical science, but also scientific ethics (Bunge, 1972). Were it not so, it is still important to distinguish between bad scientific conduct and scientific error (Drowatzky, 1993), and researchers that commit scientific fraud will have to face the corresponding academic sanctions in accordance with the type of fraud that is committed. It is not without reason that it is at university where people will be trained who will guide transformational processes from positions of power, in which a special and exemplary social responsibility is implicit (Borroto, 2004). It may be necessary to balance the criteria that are demanded with regard to publications in indexed JCR journals in accordance with the scientific discipline, in order not to arrive at such a situation. The highest valuation of articles published in JCR not only leads to the syndrome of publish or perish (Mok, 2000, p. 160), but relegates to an almost inexistent plane those publications that, even though not published in those journals, present undoubtable social and professional utility.

This manuscript is a significant contribution to the existing literature. Although the issue of the helplessness of novice professors in the university environment had been addressed previously, the personal experiences of a number of lecturers and partial-time lecturers with little experience in the university had not been analysed through qualitative research. However, this study has some limitations. Firstly, it does not take as a reference other experiences of more experienced teachers. Secondly, it is limited exclusively to the Spanish context. Therefore, it would be of special interest for future research to be able to replicate this structure of study by contrasting teachers with less and more experience, verifying whether the more experienced teachers continue to encounter the same problems in order to develop professionally. Similarly, contrasting participants from the Spanish university system with others would be very enriching.

It is very remarkable within the results, to see how the participants suffer situations of real anguish and pressure. This pressure has a direct impact on their personal lives, having to give up many things they would never have thought of. The university does not consider this, establishing more and more demanding and exclusive criteria. Although our results were derived from qualitative research conducted with a purposively selected sample, we consider that the results are applicable to any Spanish university. The accreditation systems are at a national level, which means that these pressures are suffered by the majority of new teachers seeking to enter university.

We believe that this manuscript may be of special interest to all those university teachers who wish to have guaranteed access to the university system. It will also be of interest to the entire university community, as it will help them to understand how novice teachers really experience this situation. Similarly, an in-depth reading of the manuscript is recommended to all politicians and managers in charge of drafting the criteria for access to the university environment, understanding that behind the impact factors are people with a desire to live a satisfactory social and academic life. In sum, with this article we want to contribute to the open debate on improving the conditions of the university system. This system, full of bureaucratic obstacles, with little funding and in the hands of a precarious teaching staff, takes it to the limit of its subsistence. If we want the future that destiny has in store for us not to make the Spanish university system disappear, it is necessary to establish this debate as soon as possible.

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