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Teachers' pedagogical competences in higher education: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

The current university model in a market-driven and knowledge-based society entails a change in the teachers' roles. The prevailing narrative sustains a competence-based approach in higher education, considering that quality education implies that teachers in this context must have personal, research and pedagogical skills that enable them to perform their teaching function effectively. A systematic review of empirical articles published between 2009 and 2019 provides a comprehensive and updated analysis of the higher education teachers' pedagogical competences. A total of 51 texts that describe the teaching competence components (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) were reviewed and retrieved from seven international databases in three languages. Personal skills and qualities stand out as the features most valued by students, whereas teachers highlight curriculum and instructional competence as the most important. Cultural competence and specific competences to respond to diversity and promote inclusion in higher education classrooms are almost nonexistent. The study has implications for defining quality teaching practice transnationally and designing professional development programs focused on the competences and indicators most valued. The resulting framework is also helpful for individual teachers as a tool for reflecting on their teaching characteristics and for improving their practice. It also problematises the current dominant performance-based model of teaching competence in a context that does not recognise the importance of situational profiles that cater for diversity in academic settings.

Keywords: faculty, teaching skills, teaching competence, review study, personal skills

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Practitioner Notes

1. The study shows that students value the ability to establish sound interpersonal relationships as an indicator of teaching quality in higher education.
2. Academic staff needs to develop a wider range of teaching competences that include welcoming personal skills that support a good learning climate, the ability to develop appropriate curriculum and instruction proposals, and the ability to behave and communicate in diverse cultural settings.
3. Individual teachers and teacher development programs in higher education need evidence-based studies to support the planning and evaluation of teaching competences and indicators related to teaching efficacy and student satisfaction.
4. The framework resulting from the study can be used to design professional development programs and support individual teachers' reflection on their teaching.
5. A standardized transnational dominant competence model works against a situational teaching profile. Teachers in higher education contexts need to engage in more collaborative and teacher/learner-led professional development modes to respond to local needs.

Introduction

The teaching activity in higher education is receiving increasing attention worldwide, as it incorporates the quality assessment standards in international rankings of higher education institutions. The expansion of the higher education sector in globalised societies makes it no longer a territory for the elite and comprises an internationalisation endeavour, including changes in the funding structure of public universities that stress accountability mechanisms dominated by value for money and client satisfaction (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Shah, 2013; Gómez & Moreira, 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Steinhardt et al., 2017; Zapp & Ramirez, 2019). As Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) state, “national and international competition for the best students is likely to increase among higher education institutions, thus only reinforcing pressure for quality teaching and quality assurance” (p. 11). On the other hand, quality assurance mechanisms also go hand in hand with research productivity and academic publication, important

criteria for academic rewards that will secure funding for research and the totality of academic activities (Pinheiro, 2017; Teodorescu, 2000; Hou et al., 2015).

The current needs of the globalization of the curriculum impinge on the concept of teaching quality in higher education which has reopened a debate about what universities are for (Gibbs et al., 2022), a debate clearly connected with which teachers are needed and for teaching what content. However, research merit is more valued than pedagogical competences in selection processes, regarding teaching as an obligation that often does not need to go beyond the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge (Bexley, James, & Arkoudis, 2011; Bouckaert & Kools, 2017; Horokhivska, 2018; Menke, Stuck, & Ackerson, 2018; Palaniandy, 2017; Yuan, Chen, & Peng, 2022).

As with other professions in highly competitive and demanding work contexts, teaching in higher education requires a set of complex competences, both personal and professional, including pedagogical competence, crucial to develop high quality teaching (Mas Torrelló & Olmos-Rueda, 2016; Thomsen et al., 2021). Some have been recurrently signalled, such as planning, structuring, communicating and assessing teaching, shared with non-tertiary teaching contexts and with a transnational character (King, 2018; Mas Torrelló & Olmos-Rueda, 2016; OECD, 2018; Torra Bitlloch & Esteban Moreno, 2012). However, *competence* is one of the most pervasive concepts widely used in policy documents in the OECD and European Space of Higher Education. Following the definition of the European Commission (2019):

(...) competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes; knowledge is composed of the concepts, facts and figures, ideas and theories which are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject; skills are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results, and attitudes describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, persons or situations. (p. 5)

This focus on a competence-based approach and its (over)use in higher education derive from a new paradigm for teaching and learning that places learning processes at the core of pedagogy. However, competitiveness in higher education impinges on students, who have to learn how to work autonomously, make decisions about their learning process, and engage in group work, among other tasks. It also shakes the foundations of a teaching culture that rests upon the belief that it is enough to know the subject matter to be able to teach it. Nevertheless, in

a knowledge-based society, such a role of knowledge transmitter is insufficient. Therefore, students must develop the ability to learn how to learn and the cognitive structures that will allow them to transform information into knowledge. For teachers, it is no longer enough to master the teaching content; they also need to be able to transform their knowledge of the content into knowledge they can teach.

This paper aims to update current knowledge on the relevant pedagogical knowledge, skills, and attitudes that higher education teachers should have to carry out their teaching activity at the beginning of the 21st century, apart from the constraints of the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19. A search on seven international databases was carried out in three languages (English, Spanish, and Portuguese), embracing the period of 2009-2019. The search stopped in 2019 as between 2020 until mid-2022, educational institutions transitioned into what later became known as "emergency remote teaching," a situation that disrupted the teaching *habitus* in this context but is gradually being reinstated.

Defining teaching competences in higher education

Traditionally, the teaching profile encompasses three fundamental knowledge areas: ample *knowledge* in a given field of studies (technical knowledge), on relevant theories, concepts and information; *skills* on how to develop competent professional action (methodological knowledge), and *attitudes, values, and norms* that are inherent to the teaching profession (personal and participatory knowledge) in a critically reflexive and politically committed manner (Almeida & Pimenta, 2014; Bustillos Morales, 2021; Echevarría, 2002; Salazar Botello, Chiang Vega, & Muñoz Jara, 2016).

Teaching competences should be seen as a dynamic integration of cognitive and metacognitive skills that require the development of learning how to think as a teacher. They also require learning how to learn to become a teacher, that is, acquiring a teaching identity that will make use of these competences in professional practice (European Commission, 2013). A sound personal and professional experience that informs the decisions made to deal with everyday problematic situations also characterizes the teaching profession (Mas Torrelló & Olmos-Rueda, 2016), as well as resilience, interest, effort, cultural inclusiveness and self-efficacy (Almeida et al., 2021; Gibbs et al., 2022; Thomsen et al., 2021; Zabalza, 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

One of the most recognized contributions describing the knowledge base for teaching is Lee Shulman's work. Shulman (1986, p. 9) identified three classical knowledge categories for teaching: content knowledge, which incorporates the

knowledge embedded in the subject matter that is taught; curriculum knowledge, which embraces knowledge of the curricula, syllabi and instructional materials; and pedagogical content knowledge, which is the knowledge that integrates the former into actions that inform teaching and learning processes, including ways of representing and presenting the topic to others that makes it comprehensible, as well as an understanding of what makes learning easy or difficult. Later, Shulman (1987) expanded the knowledge base for teaching into seven types: general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of the students and their characteristics, knowledge of the contexts, and knowledge of the educational objectives. All these types of knowledge are embedded in philosophical and historical educational aims and values that inform the teaching practice. Inspired by Lee Shulman's work, new concepts have emerged or been reconfigured as conduits of excellence in higher education contexts that view teaching as a field of inquiry and professional development: the scholarship of teaching (and learning)/pedagogy (Palmer & Collins, 2006; Shulman, 2011; Vieira, 2009), (online) learning communities and communities of practice (Dias, 2020; Wenger, 1999), collaborative professional development and teamwork (Gast, Schildkamp, & van der Veen, 2017).

Notwithstanding the vast amount of literature describing teaching competences, recent foci have shifted to 'new' requirements for being a competent teacher at the beginning of the 21st century, following the rapid technological advances, the social needs of increasingly globalized, multicultural, and economic unjust societies, and updated technologies on teaching resources. Appropriate pedagogical application of digital technologies (including online teaching and the evaluation of teaching practice) along with the ability to further the students' digital competences to choose the right environment and the appropriate tools (Esteve-Mon, Nebot, & Adell-Segura, 2020; Downie et al., 2021) have been recently highlighted as necessary to define an updated profile for professional development (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2021; Blayone et al., 2017). In addition, culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogies (including the adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction [EMI] or Content and Language Integrated Learning [CLIL] and intercultural competence) (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022; Dang, Bonar, & Yao, 2021; Dunworth et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2021) and inclusive teaching that caters for special needs (Collins, Azmat, & Rentschler, 2019; Moriña, 2017) have also been redesigning the teaching profile in higher education.

Consequently, various approaches conceptualise teaching competences in higher education (Abykanova et al., 2016; Horokhivska, 2018; Torra Bitlloch & Esteban Moreno, 2012; Zabalza, 2012). The reasons lie in the concept of competence, as it is highly situational. Therefore, the selection of a reference framework fluctuates

because competence is either attributed to personal characteristics, assessed in learning outcomes (*competence*), or, instead, regarded as a more encompassing construct responsive to the demands of the several educational contexts (*competency*). The competences that teachers acquire, develop, and evaluate during *in situ* actions are less studied. Even less attention is devoted to teachers' practical rationality (Schön, 1987) or to the evidence that teachers perfect their competences as they critically reflect on what they teach, how they teach, and how their students learn. It is an ongoing process of learning how to teach that demands solid theoretical foundations in their discipline and proper didactical preparation that will help improve the teachers' competence repertoire as critical and reflexive practitioners. As Zabalza (2012, p. 11) insightfully analyses, in spite of being equated with a neoliberal construct, the discussions around the concept of competence(s) have brought teaching and teaching conditions and emergencies to the fore, something that is worthwhile in itself.

In a systematic review study carried out in 2015 with 25 articles, Jerez Yáñez, Orsini Sánchez, and Hasbún Heldac (2016) identify three types of competence of an 'excellent teacher' in higher education: generic competences (personal, attitudinal and communicational characteristics) that constitute the set of characteristics, attitudes and cross curricular knowledge required in any professional area and that are transferable to different fields; pedagogical competences (teaching and learning strategies, and planning and management) and that constitute the set of skills, capabilities and aptitudes that are developed exclusively in a pedagogical setting, and mainly involve the methods used to facilitate learning, as well as planning and management practices; and disciplinary competences, less valued by students than by teachers and that constitute the minimum required knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a given disciplinary field to teach. As the majority of the studies focus on the perceived and not the observed practice, the authors highlight the need to develop further studies on the actual practice to enhance knowledge of what constitutes teaching excellence in this context.

In spite of the vast amount of literature available, much of it does not build on empirical evidence to sustain assertions about the pedagogical value and impact of the prescribed competences on students' (motivation for) learning. Furthermore, competences are often uncritically presented as 'universal', equally relevant across contexts, not situationally relevant and developed throughout time. Thus, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive systematic literature review on the pedagogical competences of higher education teachers in international contexts. It is noteworthy that it focuses on pre-pandemic times, as the pandemic disrupted

the modes of imparting teaching and learning worldwide (Gibbs et al., 2022) and has likely influenced empirical research under development. The paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What does the existing empirical literature state about the general pedagogical competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for being a higher education teacher at the beginning of the 21st century?
2. Is there a predominance of a specific type of competences? Which one(s)?
3. Are competences context-specific? Do they differ according to situational and cultural factors?

Method

The method used builds on Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016, p. 22) to typify the study as *interpretive/configurative* since it aims to broaden the current understanding of the concept of pedagogical competence in higher education. It thus contributes to theory building with additional insights and the overall picture in a process analogous to theoretical saturation in primary research. It seeks to provide a detailed account of the methodological strategies followed to identify, assemble, critically appraise, and synthesise all relevant issues on the topic under research, in a manner that can make the study reproducible (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016). After deciding on the research questions and database search, we selected the articles to extract the required data, evaluated their methodological quality, synthesised data in tables, figures and graphs, and evaluated the claims made (Galvão, Pansani, & Harrad, 2015).

Databases and literature search procedure

In order to identify studies that proposed types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for acting as a teacher in higher education, searches were performed in the databases recognized by the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking scientific community as relevant in the indexing of scientific journals linked to the knowledge areas assumed by our study, such as Education and Psychology. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed academic papers published between 2009 and 2019, with full texts available. We decided to review empirical studies only for the reason addressed in the previous section.

The next step was to select the most appropriate search terms/keywords. Given the multiplicity of terms employed in the literature worldwide that are used as synonyms for 'competence(s)' and for 'teacher' in the context of higher education, we resorted to ERIC's thesaurus and the following search terms (keywords): 'College Faculty,' 'Teacher/Teach Competences,' 'Competence,' and 'Knowledge Base for Teaching.' We also included "teach/teaching skills and attitudes" to capture the entire extent of the competence operational concept.

The databases were accessed through the documentation services of our institutions, using institutional login. Table 1 presents the criteria for searching and selecting the papers. As the search with 'college faculty' yielded 0 results in Web of Science and other databases, we decided to remove 'college' and only use 'faculty.' In some cases, we were able to find 'competence,' but not 'teach* competences' (for example, in PsychInfo). In other cases, the search with 'faculty' yielded 0 results (Dialnet, Scopus, ERIC, and PsychInfo). Therefore, in those cases, 'faculty' was removed.

Table 1

Database Search and Criteria Selection Process

Databases
- ERIC Collection - ISI Web of Science (Core Collection) - SciELO Collection - Dialnet - Redalyc - Scopus - Psychology & PsycINFO
Search scope
1. "Teach* competences" AND "Higher education" AND "Faculty" 2. "Teach* skills" AND "Higher education" AND "Faculty" 3. "Teach* attitudes" AND "Higher education" AND "Faculty" 4. "Knowledge base for teaching" AND "Higher education" AND "Faculty"
Years covered
2009-2019 (incl.)
Languages
English, Spanish, Portuguese (Brazilian/European)
Inclusion criteria
Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles; full texts available
Exclusion criteria

-
1. Not related to the study object (e.g., competences in initial teacher education, of teacher educators)
 2. Out of focus (e.g., job satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, self-confidence and other psychological factors, teachers' work environments...)
-

Selection process

Following Jesson, Matheson, and Lacey (2011) and the PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), we read the titles and abstracts in the first step and we screened the entire text to decide its inclusion when necessary. In this stage, duplicates were removed. The second step was a quality appraisal process. To this end, the following criteria adapted from the CASP Qualitative and Cohort Studies checklists were used (cf. Critical Appraisal Skills Programme: www.casp-uk.net):

- (1) Is there a clear statement of the research objectives?
- (2) Is the qualitative/quantitative methodology appropriate?
- (3) Is the research design appropriate to address the research objectives?
- (4) Is the recruitment strategy (of informants/participants) appropriate to the research objectives?
- (5) Is the data collected in a way that addresses the research question?
- (6) Have ethical considerations been considered and adequately addressed?
- (7) Is data analysis sufficiently rigorous?
- (8) Is there a clear statement of the findings?
- (9) Is the study scholarly significant?

Each criterion was assessed on a 4-point scale, where one would be “Not at all” and four would be “Very much.” To be included in the review, the articles would have to score at least 18 points, half of the maximum points possible (Gast, Schildkamp, & van de Veen, 2017). A second rater came in for those that obtained scores below this value. Interrater reliability was sought, focusing on criteria 7, 8, and 9; an intraclass correlation above 75% was used to reject the article in the final analysis (Gast, Schildkamp, & van de Veen, 2017). After this quality check, 51 papers remained, and five were discarded.

Table 2 synthesises the selection process of the papers and the final results. All 51 records selected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Table 2

Final Search Results

Information source	Records identified	Records screened	Records excluded (1 st step)	Records excluded (2 nd step)	Records analysed
Web of Science (Core Collection)	54	13	45	2	3
Scopus	29	16	21	0	4
ERIC Collection	244	63	199	2	41
Redalyc	2	1	1	0	1
Psychology Database & PsycINFO	188	12	188	0	0
Dialnet	5	3	3	0	2
SciELO Collection	12	2	11	1	0
Total	534	110	468	5	51

Data analysis

The next stage was to define the analysis foci and create the analytical device. The first step was to characterise the studies in terms of the scope and purpose of the inquiry, conceptual and methodological framework, and outcomes and implications. The analytical framework was adapted from Vieira, Moreira, and Peralta (2014), as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Analytical Framework (Adapted from Vieira, Moreira, & Peralta 2014)

A - Scope & Purpose of Inquiry	Which concepts/ components of teaching competence (knowledge/skill/attitude) are investigated? Which is the field of study/teaching area? Where does it take place?
B - Conceptual & Methodological Framework	What kind of study is it? Who participates in the study and how (data collection & analysis)?
C - Findings	Which are the components of pedagogical competence in higher education?

As stated, we decided to approach the papers from a quantitative and qualitative analytical perspective, thus creating a quali-quantitative table with comments. Table 4 presents the grid used in the analysis, first tested with three texts. Then

changes were identified and the final version was approved. The papers were analysed in small groups and discussed in online whole-group meetings.

Table 4

Analysis Grid (adapted from Vieira et al., 2014)

A. Scope & Purpose of Inquiry	
1. <i>Competence areas/concepts (looking at the focus of inquiry)</i>	a. Knowledge b. Skills c. Attitudes d. Other
2. <i>Field of study (OECD, 2007)</i>	a. Natural Sciences b. Engineering & Technology c. Medical and Health Sciences d. Agricultural Sciences e. Social Sciences f. Humanities g. Inter/Multidisciplinary
3. <i>Context (looking at country/region)</i>	a. + local b. + national c. + international
B. Conceptual & Methodological Framework	
1. Study design	a. Quantitative (experimental/ quasi-experimental, survey...) b. Qualitative (case study, action research...)
2. Data collection & analysis	(Questionnaire; interviews; documentary analysis; task analysis; observation records; field notes; reflexive records/self-report/other)
C. Findings	
<i>(Descriptive account)</i>	

Two types of analyses were carried out: a quantitative and descriptive analysis that sought to characterise the corpus in terms of scope and purpose of inquiry, context, and conceptual and methodological framework, and a qualitative and interpretive one, focused on the findings. For the former, the results were described and systematised in a graph; for the latter, a first reading would be made, followed by note-taking guided by the research questions and the analytical framework (Kuckartz, 2013). A thematic review of the articles' content was then undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using the MAXQDA software (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019) to identify core competences. The final results were synthesised in a figure and accompanying table.

Results

Quantitative description of the studies

In this section, we analyse the quantitative results regarding four foci: field of studies, study design, data collection instruments and procedures, and competence areas in several contexts (local, national or international).

When analysing the international distribution of the reviewed articles, 29.4% are from Asia, 19.6% from Europe, 11.8% from the USA and Canada, 9.8% from Africa, 9.8% from Latin America, 5.9% from the UK, 3.9% from Australia, and 9.8% compare the results in several countries. Regarding Europe, Spain dominates, with six articles, the USA and Canada with six as well, Iran with four, Turkey with three, and Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and Australia with two texts.

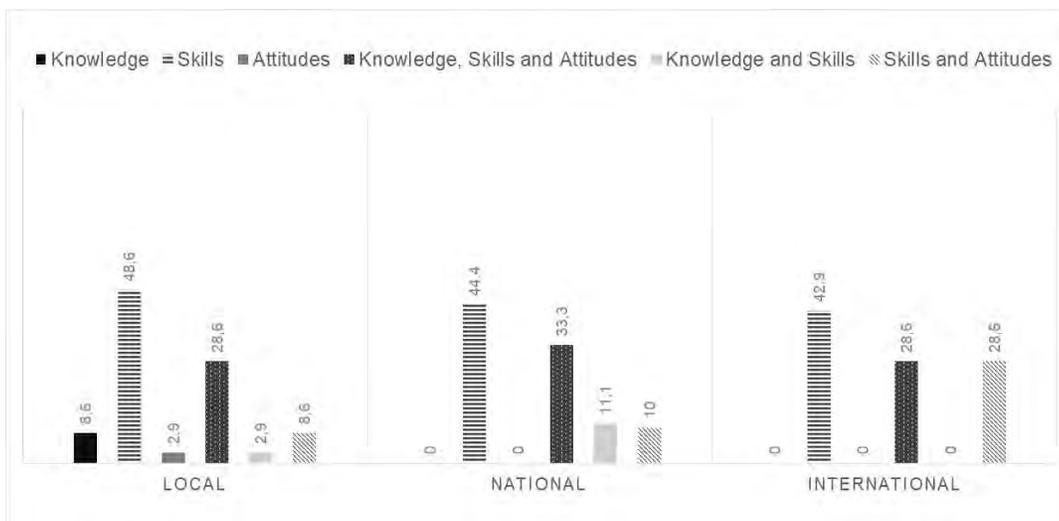
Half of the studies (54.9%) are multidisciplinary, but Social Sciences represent 27.5% of the studies, whilst 7.8% belong to the humanities field. The remaining fields account for less than 10% of the studies.

Regarding their design, there is a proximity between quantitative (51%) and qualitative studies (37.3 %). There is a similar distribution among experimental (17.6%), quasi-experimental (29.4%), and survey (29.4%) studies. Qualitative studies mostly rely on interviews (47.4%), whereas quantitative studies resort to questionnaires as the favoured data collection instrument (88.5%). Regardless of the study design, questionnaires appear as the preferred research procedure (45.1%), followed by a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures (21.1%).

Most studies (47.1%) analyse specific skills, while 29.4 % look at a more embracing concept of competence (including knowledge, skills, and attitudes). The majority are local (68.6%), while national and international studies are less common (17.6% and 13.7%, respectively). According to the context of the competence area (knowledge, skill, or attitude), there is evidence that most local studies are focused on relevant skills (48.6%). In contrast, while also privileging skills (44.4% and 42.9%, respectively), national and international studies also include a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Graph 1).

Graph 1

Interaction Between Competence Area and Context



Qualitative analysis of the studies

Qualitative analysis of the findings (Figure 1) evidences four important competence areas to define teaching in higher education.

Figure 1

Main Teaching Competences in Higher Education

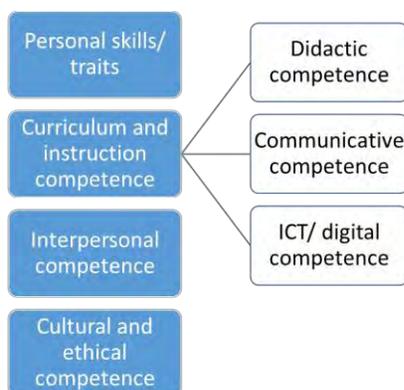


Table 5 details the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes associated with each competence identified in the studies.

Table 5*Competences (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes) Identified in the Studies*

Competence	Indicators	Papers
Personal skills/traits		
	Treating students respectfully, being objective and open-minded	Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Busler et al. (2017); Esteban Moreno et al. (2012); Gil-Madrone et al. (2016); Güvendir (2014); Husband (2015); Kaynaradağ (2019); Klafke, Oliveira and Ferreira (2019); Komos (2013); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Pekkarinen and Hirsto (2017); Ragan et al. (2012); Rebisz, Conte, and Sikora (2016); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Slate et al. (2011); Tsegay, Zegergish, and Ashraf (2018); Üstünlüoğlu (2017)
	Being stimulating, passionate, enthusiastic about one's work, patient towards students, and persistent	Belanger and Longden (2009); Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Busler et al. (2017); De Juanas Oliva and Beltrán Llera (2014); Ergin (2019); Kaynaradağ (2019); Lee, Kim, and Chan (2015); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Slate et al. (2011); Üstünlüoğlu (2017); Wygal, Watty, and Stout (2014)
	Being a happy, positive person with a sense of humour	Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Busler et al. (2017); Güvendir (2014); Kaynaradağ (2019); Slate et al. (2011)
Curriculum & instruction competence		
Didactic competence	Ability to use different and active teaching methods, strategies, or techniques to support students' learning	Ahmad et al. (2014); Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017); Belanger and Longden (2009); Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Busler et al. (2017); Carbonero et al. (2016); Dodeen (2013); Ernest et al. (2013); Gebru (2016); Gil-Madrone et al. (2016); Güvendir (2014); Karimi (2014); Kaynaradağ (2019); Klafke, Oliveira and Ferreira (2019); Komos (2013); Lee, Kim, and Chan (2015); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Molenaar et al. (2009); Monereo and Domínguez (2014); Morrison and Evans (2016); Pekkarinen and Hirsto (2017); Ragan et al. (2012); Rebisz, Conte, and Sikora (2016); Renta-Davids et al. (2016); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Sanford and Kinch (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Thoron et al. (2012); Tsegay, Zegergish, and Ashraf (2018); Üstünlüoğlu (2017); Wygal, Watty, and Stout (2014)
	Ability to structure and manage the course or lessons	Belanger, and Longden (2009); Carbonero et al. (2016); Chacón Viquez (2013); De Juanas Oliva and Beltrán Llera (2014); Draganov and Sanna (2013); Elbarbary (2015); Ernest et al. (2013); Gebru (2016); Ghonji et al. (2015); Gil-Madrone et al. (2016); Lee, Kim, and Chan (2015); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Mehdinezhad (2012); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Molenaar et al. (2009); Monereo and Domínguez (2014); Morrison and Evans (2016); Pekkarinen and Hirsto (2017); Požarnik and Lavric (2015); Ragan et al. (2012); Rebisz, Conte, and Sikora (2016); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Slate et

		al. (2011); Tawalbeh and Ismail (2014); Üstünlüoğlu (2017); Wood et al. (2011); Wygal, Watty, and Stout (2014)
	Ability to implement a motivational and fair learning assessment	Belanger and Longden (2009); Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Chacón Viquez (2013); Dodeen (2013); Gil-Madrona et al. (2016); Husband (2015); Kaynardağ (2019); Klafke, Oliveira and Ferreira (2019); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Mehdinezhad (2012); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Molenaar et al. (2009); Morrison and Evans (2016); Munoz Carril, Gonzalez Sanmamed, and Hernandez Selles (2013); Požarnik, and Lavric (2015); Ragan et al. (2012); Sanford and Kinch (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Üstünlüoğlu (2017); Wood et al. (2011)
	Ability to create a supportive classroom climate and manage the classroom effectively	Belanger and Longden (2009); Carbonero et al. (2016); Ergin (2019); Ernest et al. (2013); Ghonji et al. (2015); Gil-Madrona et al. (2016); Husband (2015); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Mehdinezhad (2012); Monereo and Domínguez (2014); Ragan et al. (2012); Rebisz, Tominska, and Sikora (2016); Sanford and Kinch (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Tawalbeh and Ismail (2014); Üstünlüoğlu (2016); Wygal, Watty, and Stout (2014)
	Coaching and mentoring ability	Ahmad et al. (2014); Carbonero et al. (2016); Lee, Kim, and Chan (2015); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); McCune (2018); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Molenaar et al. (2009); Sanford and Kinch (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Üstünlüoğlu (2017); Wood et al. (2011)
	Possessing sound content knowledge	Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Busler et al. (2017); De Juanas Oliva and Beltrán Llera (2014); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Mehdinezhad (2012); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Požarnik and Lavric (2015); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Slate et al. (2011); Tsegay, Zegergish, and Ashraf (2018); Üstünlüoğlu (2016)
Communicative competence	Ability to give clear presentations and explanations	Belanger and Longden (2009); Chacón Viquez (2013); Ghonji et al. (2015); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); McCune (2018); Monereo and Domínguez (2014); Morrison and Evans (2016); Rebisz et al. (2016); Ripoll-Núñez et al. (2018); Thoron et al. (2012); Wood et al. (2011)
	Ability to produce an academically stimulating, challenging, and engaging discourse	Ahmad et al. (2014); Belanger and Longden (2009); Lee, Kim, and Chan (2015); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Mehdinezhad (2012); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Moreno-Murcia, Torregrosa and Belando Pedreño (2015); Rebisz et al. (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Üstünlüoğlu (2017)
ICT/Digital competence	Ability to choose the right environment and the appropriate tools for (collaborative) activities	Alghamdi and Bin Sihes (2016); Busler et al. (2017); Chacón Viquez (2013); Elbarbary (2015) Ernest et al. (2013); Esteban Moreno et al. (2012); Mashinchi et al. (2017); McCune (2018); Mehdinezhad (2012); Ragan et al. (2012); Thoron et al. (2012)

Interpersonal competence	
Developing rapport, and strong relationships with students	Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015); Chacón Viquez (2013); Dodeen (2013); Ergin (2019); Esteban Moreno et al. (2012); Gil-Madrona et al. (2016); Güvendir (2014); Long, Ibrahim, and Kowang (2014); Miron and Mevorach (2014); Monereo and Domínguez (2014); Morrison and Evans (2016); Pekkarinen and Hirsto (2017); Rebisz, Tominska, and Sikora (2016); Slate et al. (2011); Üstünlüoğlu (2016)
Cultural and ethical competence	
Behaving and relating to people according to expected sociocultural norms	Alghamdi and Bin Sihes (2016); Mashinchi, Hashemi, and Khani (2017); Morettini, Brown, and Viator (2018); Sanford and Kinch (2016)

When analysing the studies that rely on the student's perceptions, the teachers' personal skills or personal traits appear at the top of their preferences for defining a competent teacher. These traits include treating students respectfully, being stimulating, passionate, and enthusiastic about their work, as well as being a happy and positive person with a sense of humour. Effective teaching rests on being enthusiastic about teaching, having the ability to connect with the students (e.g., Klafke, Oliveira, & Ferreira, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2017), and being a good listener, sensitive to the students' needs, "a person who relates to students as equal human beings" (Miron & Mevorach, 2014, p. 85), even in online teaching (Ragan et al., 2012). Regardless of their graduate degree field of studies, the students expect their teachers to be caring and considerate (e.g., Klafke, Oliveira, & Ferreira, 2019), going beyond classroom matters to support students who have difficulties in their personal life or with their studies (e.g., Bradley, Kirby, & Madriaga, 2015).

When looking at the teachers' perceptions and practices, curriculum and instruction constitute "the what, how and why of teaching and learning" (Mehdinezhad, 2012, p. 215). Didactic competence is the most valued. The use of different and active teaching methods, strategies, or techniques to support students' learning is the most salient indicator of this competence, followed by the ability to structure and manage the course or lessons.

The ability to implement a motivational and fair learning assessment is also highly valued, as well as creating a supportive classroom climate and managing the classroom effectively, in tandem with possessing sound content knowledge. Being able to develop a good program or teaching plan (e.g., Dragonov & Sanna, 2013; Ghonji et al., 2015), varying one's teaching style, and using active and diverse teaching methods, strategies or techniques to support students' learning and assessment (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2014; Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017; Üstünlüoğlu, 2016) seem to be the key to effective teaching for both teachers and students. Higher education teachers also need to ensure a proper educational climate and to be able to deal with conflicts and with students' inappropriate behaviours (e.g., Carbonero et al., 2017; Tawalbeh & Ismail, 2014). However, it is also acknowledged that there is a need for didactic training in this context (Karimi, 2014).

Curriculum and instructional competence embrace communicative competence and ICT/Digital competence. Regarding communicative competence, the ability to give clear presentations and explanations stands out, followed by an academically stimulating, challenging and engaging discourse: "Even though communication is a two-way process with both students and instructors involved, it is the instructors

who are the powerful parties in organising and maintaining the communication nature and flow in the classroom” (Kaynardağ, 2019, p. 8).

Even though there is a trend for arguing that online teaching requires a different set of competences, there is scarce evidence of this. It is recognised that instructional technology can improve the quality and quantity of teaching and students' learning (e.g., Klafke, Oliveira, & Ferreira, 2019; Mehdinezhad, 2012; Sanford & Kinch, 2016), but teachers need to develop this area of expertise (De Juanas Oliva & Llera, 2014). There is no direct path to transitioning “from a face-to-face format to the online classroom [as it] requires a careful adaptation of a wide variety of skills and competences (...) [and] new competences (...) necessary beyond those essential for the face-to-face classroom” (Ragan et al., 2012, p. 84). Web-based teaching can infuse variety and creativity in teaching materials. However, students and teachers alike seem to value face-to-face interactions more (e.g., Pekkarinen & Hirsto, 2017), as it is not always evident that technology is not used only for the sake of it (Üstünlüoğlu, 2016).

Other secondary competences associated with curriculum and instruction include counselling, mentoring and guiding students or providing support and advice (e.g., Miron & Mevorach, 2014; Požarnik & Lavrič, 2015; Sanford & Kinch, 2016).

Interpersonal competence is scarce, mainly highlighting the importance of developing rapport and strong interpersonal relationships with students that extend beyond the classroom, along with solving problems and conflicts (e.g., Bradley, Kirby, & Madriaga, 2015; Esteban Moreno et al., 2012; Pekkarinen & Hirsto, 2017).

Cultural competence arises when studies take the cultural context as a study object, associated with sharing ideals and behaving according to the precepts and norms in which the studies take place, which is the case of studies that take place in Islamic contexts (Mashinchi, Hashemi, & Khani, 2017). When compared to the other competences, it loses importance (Alghamdi & Bin Sihes, 2016), even though it is recognised that cultural contexts explain differences in the perception of the importance and satisfaction with the teaching methods and the roles expected from the students (Üstünlüoğlu, 2016). Developing intercultural skills for teaching and mentoring adult/non-traditional learners and developing skills to implement inclusive practices and support for diversity are recognised as needed for staff development (Sanford & Kinch, 2016). Many studies highlight the importance of continuous professional development as “a catalyst for professional growth” (Mehdinezhad, 2012, p. 225), in line with the literature for other teaching levels.

Discussion

The majority of the studies do not aim at building a new framework of competences; even though they are multidisciplinary, the studies are mainly local and aim at applying existing frameworks, verifying whether the competences exist in the contexts studied. This outcome is evident in that the majority analyse specific skills, often evaluated resorting to questionnaires and checklists. The assumption is that there is an ideal profile, and the intent is to evaluate existing profiles with reference to a dominant competence model. Studies that take a bottom-up approach and ask students, from scratch, what an ideal, excellent, and inspiring teacher is are rare (see Bradley, Kirby, & Madriaga, 2015 for an example).

As with previous studies, there are several paths to conceptualise teaching competences in higher education (cf. Abykanova et al., 2016; Horokhivska, 2018; Zabalza, 2012). Our results show no significant differences in *what is valued as general pedagogical competences at the beginning of the 21st century* (research question one). Teaching efficacy continues to be associated with “an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitudes as manifested in both the teachers' performance and reflection on their performance” (Mehdinezhad, 2012, p. 214).

Personal skills and traits are still the highest valued quality of a competent teacher in higher education (cf. Gunn & Fisk, 2013; Jerez Yáñez, Orsini Sánchez, & Hasbún Heldac, 2016), particularly by students. In addition, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge are still predominant (cf. Shulman & Wilson, 2004). Therefore, contrary to research and publication standards and processes, the teaching profession does not seem to have changed much. Teaching in higher education has not been significantly affected by the current marketisation movements associated with the secondary sector, namely the standardisation of didactic materials and resources. It is acknowledged that digital and technological competences, as well as intercultural skills and those to address the need of ‘non-traditional’ students in higher education are on the rise for high demand. We need to bear in mind that we analysed studies that took place in pre-pandemic times. The option for this period is explained by the expectation that after the critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face teaching will resume worldwide, with surgical adjustments. However, teachers will still need support in the development of their digital skills, as technology is here to stay (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022; Sumer, Douglas, & Sim, 2021).

Regarding the *predominance of a specific type of competence* (research question two), personal qualities and traits stand out, especially the ability to enter the

student's world and show empathy and genuine interest in the students and their reality and help build the students' trust and confidence. The ability to use different and active teaching methods, strategies, and techniques to support student learning is of paramount importance. However, as stated, the students highlight the relevance of personal skills, whereas the teachers value instructional skills the most.

Likewise, this evidence reinforces the stability and immutable nature of teaching in this context, despite the massive introduction of technologies and online teaching programmes and courses. Interestingly, being technologically savvy is highly valued by teachers, but not by students, which brings to the discussion the need for the digital paraphernalia that has been impinged on teachers and institutions as a requirement for 'quality teaching' in the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. For a generation of students that have grown up immersed in digital culture, welcoming personal traits and solid communicative skills that foster a sense of belonging and human connection and minimize feelings of maladjustment and psychological discomfort are more critical than ever (cf. Casanova et al., 2022; McGill, Turrietta, & Lal, 2021).

Contrary to what happens in some teaching contexts, responding to a diverse student population with a social justice agenda, fostering one's professional development, or engaging in collaborative work within a culturally inclusive approach (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith, Gleeson, & Mitchell, 2010; Thomsen et al., 2021), are practically absent. Collaboration is still present (Esteban Moreno et al., 2012), although not highly valued for defining quality for the teaching profession in this context, contrary to what is advocated for non-tertiary teaching (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Therefore, teaching in higher education seems to be a more solitary professional activity than teaching at other education levels.

Even though there is recognition of the situational nature of the teaching profession and the responsive and social nature of the professional activity, *teaching competences do not seem to be either situational or cultural* (research question three), but part of a global profile. In this review, only the studies that take place in Islamic contexts signal the need to take into account the teacher's cultural profile and competence (Alghamdi & Bin Sihes, 2016; Morettini, Brown & Viator, 2018; Mashinchi et al., 2017; Sanford & Kinch, 2016).

Even though cultural competence is increasingly perceived as necessary in the globalization of the curriculum, the prevailing (standardized) dominant competence model makes it difficult to operationalize it in a teaching profile, due to its highly situational nature. Cultural competence overlaps with concepts such as

intercultural and multicultural competences. In addition, it embraces knowledge, awareness, and skills that facilitate communication, as well as establishes relationships based on reciprocity and mutual understanding (Chun & Evans, 2016). Cultural competence is often included in social and communicative competences, which may explain why we got so few results.

Limitations and recommendations

There are very few systematic review studies on teaching competences in higher education. They generally search in two main databases (Web of Science and Scopus) and focus on the English language. Additionally, the analysis foci tend to be narrow, at the expense of comprehensiveness (see Dang, Bonar, & Yao, 2021; Evans, 2013; Winberg et al., 2019). Mapping the field is paramount to navigating it, as well as identifying knowledge gaps.

However, we recognise the limitations that arise from our objective of extracting comprehensive information from qualitative and quantitative data, which prevented an in-depth analysis. As we were dealing with three languages and with translation for analysis on a qualitative data basis, on-going clarification of the concepts and processes among the team was required. Even though the use of three languages made the review more internationally inclusive, it is highly likely that concepts bear different meanings in all the papers or regional contexts of the globe. It is also likely that the keywords selected did not capture all the texts that could have been included, not only due to translation issues but also because not all journals require the use of a thesaurus.

A pandemic irrupted us as we were collecting our data. The academic years of 2020-2022 were a period of constant interruption or even suspension of face-to-face teaching activities. The teaching delivery modes changed worldwide and higher education had to adapt swiftly to an 'emergency response' mode that is gradually being abandoned, as higher education institutions either go back to 'business as usual' or increase their offer of e-learning programs. The pandemic period needs a study on its own, for its very particular characteristics that include a change in delivery modes, design features, and type of support teachers need (Al-Naabi, Kelder, & Carr, 2021; Crawford et al., 2021; Sumer, Douglas & Sim, 2021), as the role of universities has changed with the COVID-19 (Gibbs et al., 2022). Thus, there is a need to develop further review studies on the way teaching competence is perceived during and after the pandemic, as it is very likely that technological and digital competences are highlighted. In our review study, the students value personal rapport with the teachers much more than technological competences, so this result would still stand as discussed above.

Conclusions

Our review study shows that teaching competence in higher education has remained a relatively stable construct in the timeframe analysed. It builds on a standardised dominant transnational competence model mainly comprised of observable skills that can be assessed through questionnaires and checklists. Even though the majority of the studies are local, the current personal and institutional obsession for competitiveness results in focusing on assessing teachers' behaviour and their adjustment to competence standards pre-set by transnational organisations such as the OECD or the European Commission that have become the epistemological communities in (consensually) defining what constitutes quality teaching in higher education (Ball, 2003; Shahjahan, 2020).

Although no theoretical model agrees upon a concept of what it means to be a 'good' teacher in higher education, what seems to be consensual is that excellence is not in the genes. Teachers develop their teaching competence during their life trajectories and in an ongoing process of identity construction, building on what they imagine quality teaching to be in their academic and professional communities, in formal or informal professional development spaces. The study's resulting framework can work as a valuable tool for detailing and analysing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote teaching efficacy and student satisfaction. It can be experimented with in the design and evaluation of professional development programs and as a reflection device for the individual teacher, in dialogue with their students. Thus, it can be placed at the service of improving the pedagogical practice in higher education.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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