



Transformations and Challenges in Chilean Higher Education: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for the Improvement of Educational Processes

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Abstract

In recent decades, Higher Education has undergone significant changes, such as the Bologna Process in Europe and Alfa Tuning in Latin America, driving continuous improvement in universities and teaching staff. In Chile, the update of the “criteria and standards” by the CNA has introduced a focus on “Teaching Research and Innovation”, steering public policy towards the improvement of educational processes. This study focuses on the systematization of evidence regarding the institutional supports in Chilean universities to strengthen teaching research, utilizing a socio-ethnographic and mixed methodology. The results indicate that all CRUCH universities have implemented initiatives to strengthen teaching research, with one-third having specific funds and one in eight offering diplomas in this area. Additionally, inter-university networks have facilitated collaboration and systematic reflection. However, challenges are identified, such as the lack of clear institutional guidelines and the need for greater recognition of this type of research. It is concluded that, although considerable progress has been made, it is necessary to continue developing policies and structures that effectively support and disseminate teaching research.

KEYWORDS: SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING, SoTL, HIGHER EDUCATION, EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

Introduction

In recent decades, Higher Education has undergone significant changes, such as the Bologna Process in Europe, Alfa Tuning in Latin America, and the current proposals from UNESCO (González et al., 2004; UNESCO, 2022a). These changes drive continuous improvement in universities and among educators, emphasizing lifelong learning and adaptation to social, cultural, technological, and environmental changes, promoting local and global social justice with a focus on gender and inclusion (Billing, 2004; Espinoza & González, 2012; Fernández & Ramos, 2020; Orellana et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2022b).

In Chile, the update of the “criteria and standards” by the CNA (2022) introduces a new criterion focused on “SoTL and Innovation to Improve the Educational Process”. This inclusion guides public policy, improving the educational processes in higher education institutions. Each institution must periodically update its educators, based on research, teaching innovation, and the application of policies to ensure quality and relevance.

Theoretical Framework

The challenges of the CNA (2022) emphasize that teaching reflection and research, along with collaboration, improve educational quality and relevance (Anderson et al., 2020; McDonough, 2016). These findings highlight the importance of faculty engagement in the continuous improvement of their pedagogical practices (Bidabadi, 2016; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Trigwell et al., 2012). Research in university teaching often adopts the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (SoTL) approach. This approach promotes the systematic study of teaching and learning, sharing findings for review and dissemination, and implementing changes in the classroom (Abou Baker, 2007; Anderson et al., 2020; Boyer, 1990; Chick, 2018; Chocarro et al., 2013; Geertsema, 2016; Hubball y Burt, 2006; Hutchings y Shulman, 1999; Kreber, 2002).

Research in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States has identified challenges and opportunities for the institutionalization of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) (Canning & Masika, 2022; Franks y Payakachat, 2020; Myatt et al., 2018; Smith & Walker, 2024; Thelen & Santucci, 2024). These studies highlight the need for a structured and clear approach to its development and academic recognition. The lack of precise definitions and clear expectations creates uncertainty, hindering the academic development of teaching. It is recommended that universities strengthen their support for SoTL by integrating it into their policies and reward systems, legitimizing it as a central academic pathway.

Methodology

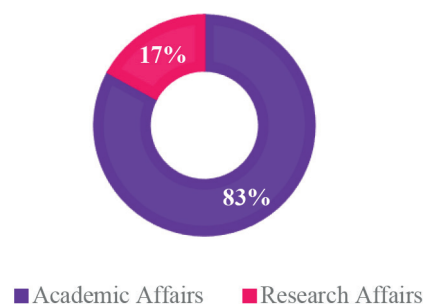
This study aims to systematize evidence regarding institutional supports in Chilean universities to strengthen research in university teaching. The evidence is collected and systematized through a socio-ethnographic approach (Lapassade, 1991), supported by a mixed methodology (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Bryman, 2006) that considered the following:

- Field notes (Álvarez, 2011) from inter-university workshops and RENIDES assemblies.
- Documental analysis (Dulzaides & Molina, 2004; Peña & Pirela, 2007) of documents from the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH).
- Descriptive quantitative analysis (Chacma & Laura, 2021).
- Twenty interviews with academic developers from Chilean universities.

Results

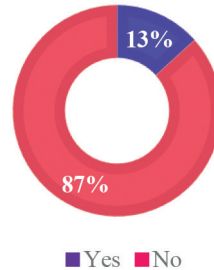
Of the 30 CRUCH universities, all have implemented initiatives to strengthen SoTL, led by Vice Provost for Academic Affairs in 80% of cases and by Vice Provost for Research Affairs in 20%; only one in five has a specific policy (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Vice Provost for



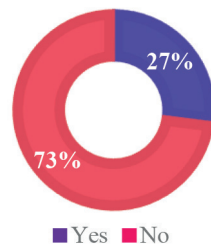
One in eight Chilean universities offers a diploma in SoTL for their faculty. These programs, ranging from 116 to 160 hours (5-6 SCT credits), cover SoTL epistemology, learner-centered methodologies, educational innovation, research design, data analysis, and the publication of results (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Diploma



One-third of Chilean universities have SoTL Funds, granting between US\$1,300 and US\$5,000 over 10-24 months, aimed at innovating in teaching, strengthening academic work, generating knowledge, and impacting teaching and learning processes.

Figure 3. SoTL Funds



Significant advances include thematic conferences and the establishment of inter-university networks such as RENIDES, REDSUP, and LatinSoTL, which have strength-ened collaboration and systematic reflection on the academic development of teaching. However, challenges persist, such as the lack of clear institutional guidelines in those universities that have only recently begun to institutionalize support for the development of this type of research, as well as the need for greater recognition and dissemination of these initiatives.

Discussion

The new CNA's regulations have driven the development and academic strengthening of teaching, leading to the increasing institutionalization of initiatives for SoTL. This is reflected in the implementation of internal policies, diploma programs, specific funds, and their integration into the academic career. Additionally, SoTL Funds have facilitated reflection on teaching and learning, promoting their effective transfer, while inter-university networks have created spaces for reflection at a systemic level.

Despite these advances, the lack of formal institutional guidelines and visibility continues to hinder the recognition and dissemination of teaching research. Moreover, the differentiated structure of

Higher Education Institutions presents obstacles for the evaluation and monitoring of the institutionalization of these initiatives.

Conclusions

The evolution of higher education in Chile shows a comprehensive approach to research in teaching, driven by new CNA regulations, which have promoted structural changes and academic development in teaching. Chilean universities have demonstrated a significant commitment by implementing specific policies, programmes and funds to institutionalise these initiatives. In addition, inter-university networks have strengthened collaboration and the exchange of best practices. However, structural challenges remain, such as the lack of clear guidelines in some institutions, which limits the recognition and dissemination of research in teaching.

Limitations and Future Research

This study focuses on Chilean universities, which may not fully reflect the situation in other national contexts. It is essential to expand research to different international contexts to compare and contrast approaches. Additionally, evaluating the long-term impact of the implemented policies and programs will allow for a deeper understanding of their effectiveness in improving educational quality.

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