

Work Passion and Identity in Higher Education Teaching of Business Administration in Brazil

Work Passion e Identidade na Docência no Ensino Superior de Administração no Brasil

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the identification of Brazilian university professors with the teaching profession and its relationship with *work passion* in an adverse context. In recent years, this context in Brazil has been characterized by budget cuts, precarious infrastructure in universities, outdated remuneration for faculty members, political tensions, scientific denialism, increasing pressure for research productivity, an overload of activities related to teaching, research, extension, and administration, as well as attacks on academic freedom amid intense political polarization and attempts to curtail this freedom. To understand this scenario, a qualitative study was conducted with 26 faculty members from Administration programs at public universities, complemented by secondary data collection. The results indicate that, despite these challenges, professors do not disengage from their profession; on the contrary, their *work passion* reinforces their teaching identity and sustains their commitment to the career. The study highlights the need for public and institutional policies that ensure adequate conditions for the practice of teaching, reducing the exclusive reliance on individual effort for professional continuity.

Keywords: Work passion; teaching identity; scientific denialism; productivity pressure.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa a identificação de professores universitários brasileiros com a docência e sua relação com a *work passion* em um cenário adverso. Nos últimos anos, esse contexto no Brasil tem sido caracterizado por cortes de verbas, infraestrutura precária nas universidades, remuneração defasada para os docentes, tensões políticas, negacionismo científico, intensa e crescente cobrança por produtividade em termos de pesquisas, acúmulo de atividades voltadas ao ensino, pesquisa, extensão e gestão, além de ataques à liberdade acadêmica dos professores em meio à intensa polarização política e tentativas de cerceamento dessa liberdade. Para compreender esse cenário, foi conduzido um estudo qualitativo com 26 docentes

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RESUMO de cursos de Administração de universidades públicas, aliado à coleta de dados secundários. Os resultados mostram que, apesar das dificuldades, os professores não perdem a identificação com a profissão; ao contrário, sua *work passion* fortalece sua identidade docente e sustenta sua permanência na carreira. O estudo destaca a necessidade de políticas públicas e institucionais que assegurem condições adequadas para o exercício da docência, reduzindo a dependência exclusiva do esforço individual para a continuidade na profissão.

Palavras-chave: *Work passion*; Identidade docente; *Burnout*; Negacionismo científico; Pressão por produtividade.

Introduction

The practice of teaching in the university environment in Brazil has been developed under persistent challenges and continuous adversities. This context is especially evidenced when considering the perception of low remuneration and recognition of professors in relation to the complexity of the work they perform (Meirelles et al., 2024), the decline in the level of investment in higher education – mainly in the field of research (Segundo & Goulart, 2025; Souza, 2022) – and the intense and growing demand for productivity in terms of research (Viana & Helal, 2024). Furthermore, the accumulation of activities related to teaching, research, outreach, and management stands out (Brunstein, Domenico, & Silva, 2019), as well as the diagnosis of physical and emotional illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout syndrome, resulting from the pressures of teaching work (Segarra & Williams, 2025; Dos Santos & Christofoletti, 2025). Added to this is the denial of science (Rodrigues et al., 2025), accentuated in the context of distrust regarding the effectiveness of research on COVID-19, and attacks on the academic freedom of professors amidst intense Brazilian political polarization (SBPC, 2022). Even in this scenario, according to the present study, it is possible to find professors who are passionate about their profession. The concept of work passion was defined in the seminal article by Vallerand et al. (2003) as “[...] a strong inclination towards an activity that people enjoy, that they find important and in which they invest time and energy” (p. 757), also being an activity that is part of the individual’s identity. It is emphasized that this issue of identity represents one of the central points of this concept, since it is through the internalization of work in the individual’s identity that their passion is built. In the field

of teaching, teacher identity can be understood as “[...] the way in which teachers, both individually and collectively, see and understand themselves as teachers” (Mockler, 2011, p. 2).

It is argued, therefore, that the teacher’s passion for teaching work is built in the experience of the aforementioned identification processes, experiencing positive aspects (constant learning, interaction with students, sense of personal fulfillment and social contribution) and negative aspects (intense workload, demands for productivity, outdated remuneration) of the profession.

Although the theme of identity is relevant to understanding the work passion of teachers, studies on the relationship between work passion and teaching work have mainly emphasized the following topics: the positive emotions of the passionate teacher and the feeling of care for students (Silva & Barcelos, 2021), highlighting the well-being of the teacher (Golab et al., 2025); their satisfaction (Noviantoro et al., 2022), resulting in good academic performance of students (Ramzan et al., 2021); the creation of positive and welcoming learning environments for students due to the passion of teachers (Žydzīunaitū & Arce, 2021); the sense of contribution to society that passionate teachers possess (Mirshojaee et al., 2019); and passion for work as a factor capable of improving the well-being and professional effectiveness of teachers in higher education (Yu & Ying, 2024).

Given the relevance of work passion to teaching, the importance of deepening identity in understanding the development of work passion, and the adverse context for higher education in public universities in the country, this research effort becomes pertinent. The objective of the study is to analyze the identification process of Brazilian university professors, working in administration courses, with teaching work and its relationship with work passion amidst adverse contexts. To this end, a basic qualitative study was conducted (Merriam, 2015), in which 26 interviews were carried out with professors from Administration courses at Brazilian public universities. Data analysis was performed using the content analysis proposed by Saldaña (2009), using emotion code coding.

As main contributions, this article aims to shed light on the dualistic model of work passion (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010; Chichেকian & Vallerand, 2022; Vallerand et al., 2024), especially as applied to teaching practice. Work passion has been a relevant topic in the context of organizational studies, especially due to the

positive effects associated with the physical and mental well-being of professionals and the prevention of occupational diseases, such as burnout (Martínez-Alvarado, 2021; Morilla-Luchena et al., 2021), since passion is relevant in the educational context and in various learning spaces (Vallerand et al., 2024).

Thus, the article then presents a theoretical discussion on work passion and identity, delves into the notion of teacher identity, and contextualizes the adverse scenario of teaching in Brazilian public universities; next, it describes the methodological procedures and develops the analysis and discussion of the results, highlighting how work passion is articulated with the processes of identification and sustains permanence in the teaching career; finally, the study concludes with final considerations, in which the main theoretical and practical contributions of the research are outlined and discussed.

Work Passion and Identity

Work passion represents “a strong inclination toward an activity that people enjoy, find important, and in which they invest time and energy,” with this activity being internalized as part of the individual’s identity (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). A deeper understanding of the concept of identity is essential for comprehending work passion from the perspective of the dualistic model (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010; Chichekian & Vallerand, 2022). For these authors, identity is the element that differentiates work passion from other constructs related to the work context, such as motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Thus, the relationship between identity and work passion refers to the very development of passion in the individual, elevating the element of identity as one of the pillars of the dualistic model of work passion (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015; Astakhova et al., 2022; Vallerand et al., 2024). In this sense, identity represents the individual’s answer to the question “who am I?”, in the sense that the person identifies the set of attributes that constitute him or her as a person (Jaques, 2013). These attributes can be his goals, “social roles, values and ideologies, considered central to his self-representation and which give him a sense of psychosocial unity and an understanding of his place in society” (Jaques, 2013, p. 139).

However, it is necessary to highlight and deepen the study by Vallerand et al. (2003), which emphasizes that identity also occurs in historical and cultural contexts, being a social construction (Landin, 2024). This social perspective of identity presupposes a construction process in which “identities are composed not only of cultural institutions, but also of symbols that represent a way of constructing meaning that influences and organizes both actions and the conception that the subject has of himself” (Landin, 2024, p. 5). It is through lived experiences in the social context that the individual organizes the meanings that are gradually internalized through identification processes. Identification is defined as “[...] a psychological process through which the individual assimilates an aspect, a priority, an attribute of the other and transforms himself, totally or partially” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2001, p. 295). Thus, identification occurs through internalization, that is, the individual assimilates his or her lived experiences in the work context and makes them an integral part of his own identity, this process being relevant for the development of a sense of self-affirmation or self-recognition (Astakhova & Porter, 2015).

This movement contrasts with the process of disidentification (Dukerich, Kramer, & Parks, 1998), which occurs when an individual develops aversion and progressive distancing from work, failing to internalize experiences from environments considered aversive, difficulties connecting with activities and people, as well as unmet expectations, values, and norms related to work activities (Bryan, Baldrige, & Yang, 2021). As a consequence of disidentification, the individual begins to perceive themselves as someone who does not belong to that work group or professional category (Dukerich et al., 1998). The following table highlights the concepts discussed above:

Finally, it is concluded that the social and individual perspectives of identity, in constant construction, make the individual simultaneously character and author – “[...] a character in a story that he/her himself constructs and that, in turn, constitutes him/her as an author” (Jaques, 2013, p. 139). Complementarily, it is argued that “identities are social constructions; they promote bridges that connect individuals to society. This is important because it means that passion is also a social construction” (Vallerand & Houliort, 2019, p. 92). Thus, work passion intertwines with the individual’s identity through social construction. If work passion provides an affective-motivational lens for understanding the bond with work, the notion of teacher

Table 1. Conceptual synthesis of work passion, identity, identification, and disidentification.

Conceito	Definição	Autores
Work passion	A strong inclination towards an activity that the individual enjoys, considers important, and in which they invest time and energy, with this activity being internalized as part of their identity. It constitutes a construct distinct from motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, with identity as one of its central pillars in the dualistic model.	Vallerand et al. (2003); Vallerand (2010); Vallerand (2015); Chichekian& Vallerand (2022); Astakhova et al. (2022); Vallerand et al. (2024)
Identity	An individual's response to the question "who am I?", understood as the set of attributes that constitute them as a person, including goals, social roles, values, and ideologies. It is an individual and social construct, historically and culturally situated, that organizes meanings, guides actions, and influences how the subject perceives themselves and positions themselves in society.	Jaques (2013); Vallerand et al. (2003); Vallerand (2015); Landin (2024); Vallerand & Houliort (2019)
Identification	A psychological process through which an individual assimilates aspects, priorities, or attributes of another person or of the context, transforming themselves totally or partially. It occurs through the internalization of lived experiences, especially at work, making them an integral part of their identity and contributing to self-affirmation or self-recognition.	Laplanche & Pontalis (2001); Astakhova & Porter (2015)
De-identification	The process by which an individual develops aversion to and progressive distancing from work or a professional group, ceasing to internalize experiences from contexts perceived as aversive. As a consequence, they no longer recognize themselves as belonging to that professional group or category.	Dukerich, Kramer & Parks (1998); Bryan, Baldridge & Yang (2021)

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2026).

identity makes it possible to advance in understanding how this bond is constructed, sustained, and how it is strained throughout the professional trajectory, as will be addressed in the next section, dedicated to Teacher Identity.

Teacher Identity

Recent studies on teacher identity have addressed this theme as a relevant phenomenon for teachers in their process of constructing individuality, considering their relationship with themselves and with the world (Toledo & Pereira, 2022). Regarding teacher identity, Pimenta and Anastasiou (2010) argue that it is constructed from the meaning that each teacher attributes to their profession, which occurs in their daily lives “[...] based on their values, their way of situating themselves in the world, their life history, their representations, their knowledge, their anxieties and desires, the meaning that ‘being a teacher’ has in their life” (Pimenta & Anastasiou, 2010, p. 77).

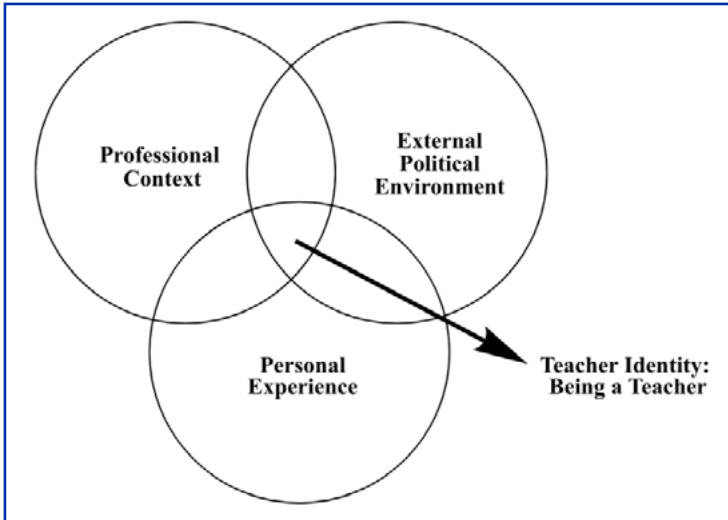
By sharing beliefs, attitudes, and values in their interaction with other teachers, this professional acquires a sense of belonging to a social group (Vassenden & Rusnes, 2022). For the purposes of this article, Mockler’s (2011) understanding of teacher identity will be adopted, which represents the

[...] the way in which teachers, both individually and collectively, see and understand themselves as teachers. The professional identity of a teacher is thus understood as being formed within, but also outside, the narratives and stories that form the ‘fabric’ of teachers’ lives. (Mockler, 2011, p. 2).

According to Mockler (2011), teacher identity is constructed from three perspectives: the professional context, the external political environment, and personal experience, as shown in Figure 1.

According to Mockler (2011), the first perspective related to the construction of teacher identity is the professional context, which refers to aspects of the teacher’s experience in the educational field. This context may involve the history of their career, their learning and their professional development, that is, any experiences that contribute to their perception of being a teacher.

Figure 1. Three perspectives on the construction of teacher identity.



Source: Adapted from Mockler (2011).

In this scenario, it is possible to insert the processes of identification of teachers with the different pillars of teaching work – especially in the university context, the focus of this research – which are: (i) teaching, understood as the systematic process of knowledge construction; (ii) research, referring to the systematic process of knowledge production; (iii) extension, understood as the educational, cultural and scientific process established between the educational institution and society; and (iv) management, related to the administration of people and resources with the aim of achieving the goals of the teaching-learning process (Barbosa & Mendonça, 2016). Each aspect of teaching work presents specific demands and, consequently, arouses a particular interest in each teacher. Thus, some may identify more with classroom teaching (“I am a teacher”), while others may identify more with research (“I am a teacher; researcher”).

The second perspective regarding the construction of teacher identity, according to Mockler (2011), is the external political environment. This perspective encompasses the discourses, attitudes, and representations about education and the experience of teachers, conveyed both by the media and by the development of public policies in the educational field, which directly impact the teaching practice and

its social function. Thus, it is in daily practice that positive and negative experiences reinforce the sense of vocation and professional development (Siebert et al., 2024).

In addition, the legal and regulatory landscape assists in the processes of teacher identification, insofar as the country's current legislation establishes the rights and duties of university professors, guiding in advance what is expected of their behavior and social role. In Brazil, teaching in higher education is regulated by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Brazil, 1996). Article 43 of this law establishes the purposes of higher education, including the encouragement of research and scientific investigation for the development of science and technology, as well as the creation and dissemination of culture. It also highlights the stimulation of knowledge about contemporary problems, focusing on national and regional issues, through the provision of specialized services to the community and the establishment of a relationship of reciprocity with it (Brazil, 1996).

In practice, the teaching staff of higher education plays an essential role in achieving these purposes. The LDB also defines the responsibilities of teachers, which include participation in the development of the institution's pedagogical proposal, planning and fulfilling their work plan, promoting student learning, adopting recovery strategies for students with lower performance, and fulfilling established workloads, in addition to full participation in periods dedicated to planning, evaluation, and professional development (Brazil, 1996, Art. 13).

The third perspective is personal experience, which refers to aspects of the teacher's private life, including their race, gender, and family context, as well as activities carried out outside the profession, such as hobbies, participation in community groups, and experiences related to fatherhood or motherhood (Mockler, 2011). In this context, it is emphasized that the quality of life in teaching work is strongly linked to the balance between professional and personal life, especially with regard to the relationship with family, friends, leisure activities, and aspects of the teacher's personality. In relation to this balance, the teacher's health is one of the main factors influencing their quality of life. The World Health Organization (1946) defines health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (no p.).

Mockler (2011) adds that, from the perspective of personal experience, interactions between teachers and different institutional agents, such as students, ma-

nagers, administrative staff, and parents of students, are also included, highlighting the relational and social nature of the construction of teacher identity. In this sense, the study by Van Lankveld et al. (2017) concludes that interaction with students strengthens the identity of university professors, especially when student reactions and feedback make them feel valued professionals and realize that their work has an impact on the future.

Research Context

This article considers that the process of identification of Brazilian university professors with teaching work and its relationship with work passion occurs amidst adverse contexts. By characterizing the context of this research as adverse, we attribute it to the existence of a politically and economically unstable and unfavorable environment for the faculty of public universities in Brazil, considering both internal and external factors to the universities. It is emphasized that Brazilian public universities are maintained by the State – encompassing institutions at the municipal, state, and federal levels – but constitutionally possess university sovereignty and the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension activities (Brazil, 1988).

In the internal context of universities, in recent years, significant budget cuts have been observed for the maintenance of university operations, such as expenses for water, electricity, cleaning, student assistance, and student scholarships (Putini, 2022). For example, in 2022, the federal government announced a 12% cut in the budget of federal universities, justifying the measure based on the country's financial constraints that year, which mainly affected the payment of operating expenses of these institutions (Almeida, 2022). As a consequence of successive budget cuts, the deterioration of university infrastructure has been observed, including a shortage of equipment, laboratory and office supplies, as well as deficiencies in the maintenance of the physical structure of the institutions (Vasconcelos & Lima, 2020; Nunes, 2022).

In 2024, professors from several federal universities and institutes went on strike, demanding salary adjustments due to accumulated losses, among other issues (Moya, 2024). This situation has generated a scenario of demotivation among professors, especially when considering the level of educational qualification re-

quired to teach at public universities in Brazil, which demands, at a minimum, a master's and doctoral degree (Brazil, 1996). In addition, poor working conditions stand out, focusing on the pressure for productivity of high-impact scientific articles, combined with the routine of teaching and preparing classes, assessments, projects and supervisions (D'Agostini & Titton, 2022; Viana & Helal, 2024), as well as the execution of activities related to teaching, research, extension and management (Brunstein, Domenico, & Silva, 2019).

Outside of universities, the adverse context has been marked by the scenario of political polarization in Brazil, in which groups with opposing positions have come to dominate the national social debate, a phenomenon that has intensified in the last decade and that has become more pronounced since the 2018 presidential elections (Ortellado, Ribeiro, & Zeine, 2022).

This polarized scenario in Brazilian politics has directly impacted public universities. Although these institutions are at the heart of national development plans, they have become the target of ideological debates between antagonistic political groups, both inside and outside the academic community. As a consequence, in recent years, attempts to curtail the academic freedom of universities and their professors have been reported nationwide (Fonseca, 2022).

Another aspect of this adverse context that has generated discussions in the Brazilian social landscape is scientific denialism (Rodrigues et al., 2025), a phenomenon that intensified at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in 2021. During this period, there was a widespread climate of distrust regarding the effectiveness of scientific research on the disease and the development of vaccines, which generated great concern in the Brazilian academic community. In response to this situation, several institutions made public statements. For example, some of the country's leading universities – the University of São Paulo (USP), the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), and the São Paulo State University (Unesp) – issued a joint statement emphasizing the need for a national science project and highlighting that quality scientific production represents one of the most important factors for Brazil's economic and social growth.

If, in the economic field, increasing budget cuts are leading to a loss of competitiveness for the country at a time when disputes in the world trade are becoming increasingly fierce, in the geostrategic field, the inability to understand that science is progress

and power is turning Brazil into a minor player in discussions on international relations. Similarly, if in the political field the government's disregard for the advancement of cutting-edge knowledge prevents the formulation of scientific programs capable of enabling a viable future national project, in the social sphere, the disregard for education and research tends to compromise the formation of human capital that Brazil needs to grow, making society poorer and even more unequal. (The university reacts to denialism, 2021).

Finally, one of the most striking effects for professors at public universities, given the adverse context in which they are immersed, is the diagnosis of physical illnesses, such as osteoarticular diseases and vocal cord problems (Neme & Limongi, 2020), as well as emotional illnesses, including anxiety, depression, and burnout syndrome (Segarra & Williams, 2025; Mourad et al., 2025). In addition, there are reports of cases of alcoholism, chemical dependency, and, in extreme situations, suicide (Costa, 2016). These health conditions of teachers need to be considered when investigating the phenomenon of work passion in an adverse context.

Based on the theoretical framework presented, the methodological aspects used in the construction of this article are described below.

Methodological Procedures

The research adopts a qualitative approach (Godoi & Balsini, 2010), of an interpretative nature (Hatch & Yanow, 2005), oriented towards understanding the meanings attributed by teachers to their work experience, identity construction, and the experience of work passion in adverse contexts. This is a qualitative, interpretative study, based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis with emotional coding.

As a research strategy, the basic qualitative study was adopted, in which the researcher's focus is on understanding how the research participants interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2015). In order to achieve the objectives of this research, 26 professors from Brazilian public higher education institutions (HEIs) were interviewed. The demographic characteristics of these interviewees are presented in Table 1.

The participants in the research were 26 professors from Business Administration courses at Brazilian public universities, working in institutions located in different regions of the country, which ensures geographical and institutional diversity of the empirical material. The choice of professors from public universities is aligned with the scope of the study, since the focus is on work passion and teaching identity in adverse contexts marked by budget cuts, pressures for academic productivity and political-institutional instability, characteristics strongly associated with this segment of Brazilian higher education.

The choice of Higher Education Institutions was due to these organizations having different possibilities for faculty members to work in (teaching, research, extension and management) (Brazil, 1996). The following criteria were established for selecting professors: i) professors linked to the Business Administration course; ii) at different stages of their careers, in order to collect reports from professors with different levels of experience, to enable an understanding of different stages of work passion and the processes of identification with teaching work; iii) preferably those who have (or have had) some involvement in postgraduate studies; iv) preferably those who have (or have had) some management position at the university.

The choice of professors working in the Administration course was guided by the vast field of research in Brazil, especially in the area of Administration, which is considered one of the largest higher education courses in Brazil in terms of the number of universities offering it, students enrolled and graduates (INEP, 2019). Approximately 47% of Brazilian public universities offer the Administration course, totaling 142 courses throughout the country (INEP, 2019). In 2018, Administration students accounted for approximately 4% of the number of enrollments (83,423 registered) and 4% of the number of graduates (10,706 graduates) among all courses at public universities in Brazil (INEP, 2019). Furthermore, the relevance of the Administration course for the training of professionals who need to be aware of their role as citizens, innovators, and prepared to manage increasingly complex organizations aligned with social demands, such as diversity and sustainability, was considered (Cembran et al, 2022).

To identify the teachers participating in this research, a strategic dissemination of this study was carried out through publication on social media, as well as through direct contact with coordinators of Administration courses at HEIs. From the

dissemination, the first teachers contacted the organizer of the research. In addition, the “snowball” technique (Leighton et al., 2021) was used to compose the corpus of the research.

Thus, the sampling followed the intentional principle, using the snowball technique (Leighton et al., 2021), appropriate for qualitative studies that involve subjective and sensitive experiences, such as emotions and identity at work. This strategy made it possible to reach teachers with different trajectories and experiences, expanding the empirical variation of the collected material. It is recognized that snowball sampling can generate relational bias; However, this risk was mitigated by the deliberate pursuit of regional, institutional, and career length diversity, as well as by interrupting data collection when theoretical and thematic saturation was observed, that is, when new interviews ceased to add relevant analytical categories.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews. The 26 interviews lasted, on average, one hour each. Before each interview, permission was requested to record it. There was also an explanation for each participant about the objectives of the research and a request for the signing of the Informed Consent Form. After the data collection phase, all interviews were transcribed for future analysis procedures, resulting in 184 pages of transcribed materials.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Interviewee	Age	Gender (Self-Declared)	Estado Civil	Number of Children	Educational Level	Teaching Experience Time	Time Spent In A Management Position	Time Spent In Post-Graduate Studies
E1	40	Female	Single	-	Master's degree	10 years	2 years	4 years
E2	44	Female	Married	2	Master's degree	18 years	6 months	-
E3	41	Male	Married	1	PhD	11 years	4 years	1 year and 2 months
E4	37	Male	Single	-	PhD	11 years	-	-
E5	48	Male	Divorced	1	Master's degree	18 years	-	-

E6	40	Male	Married	2	Master's degree	6 years	-	-
E7	50	Female	Married	1	PhD	21 years	4 years	9 years
E8	42	Male	Married	1	Master's degree	12 years	-	-
E9	50	Male	Divorced	-	PhD	2 years and 6 months	-	-
E10	38	Female	Single	-	PhD	15 years	-	15 years
E11	43	Male	Married	1	PhD	20 years	7 years	7 years
E12	44	Male	Married	3	Master's degree	8 years	2 years	8 years
E13	29	Male	Common-law married	-	Master's degree	6 years	-	-
E14	66	Male	Married	2	PhD	42 years	-	-
E15	40	Female	Divorced	1	PhD	12 years	12 years	-
E16	44	Male	Single	1	Master's degree	10 years	-	-
E17	28	Male	Common-law married	-	Master's degree	4 years	1 year	-
E18	34	Female	Married	1	Master's degree	9 years	1 year	1 year
E19	34	Male	Single	-	PhD	9 years	2 years	4 years
E20	33	Male	Common-law married	-	Master's degree	7 years	-	2 years
E21	46	Male	Married	1	PhD	20 years	2 years	14 years
E22	33	Female	Married	-	PhD	10 years	-	-
E23	34	Male	Married	2	PhD	6 years	5 years	1 year
E24	55	Female	Married	3	PhD	18 years	6 years	18 years
E25	60	Female	Married	3	Master's degree	20 years	6 years	3 years
E26	36	Female	Single	-	PhD	7 years	6 years	1 year and 6 months

Source: Research data (2025).

Furthermore, data was collected based on secondary documents (Creswell; Creswell, 2018), published in news articles from widely circulated and viewed magazines and newspapers in Brazil over the last ten years concerning the teaching landscape in higher education in the country. The objective of this collection was

to seek documentary resources to understand the economic, political, and social context in which Brazilian public higher education institutions are embedded, as well as the context of the teachers who work in them. The criteria for selecting the news articles included: i) period corresponding to the political and institutional context analyzed; ii) thematic relevance (budget cuts, attacks on the university, pandemic, academic productivity); iii) media with wide national circulation. These data were treated as elements of contextualization and empirical illustration, contributing to the understanding of the adverse environment in which teachers construct their identity and experience work passion. The summary of the bibliographic research is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the bibliographic research.

Electronic addresses of the searches	Descriptors used	Number of selected news items
https://www.folha.uol.com.br/ ; https://www.estadao.com.br/ ; https://www.exame.com/ ; https://veja.abril.com.br/ ; https://g1.globo.com/ .	• Teaching in higher education in Brazil; • Teaching in Brazilian public universities; • Professors at Brazilian public universities; • Working conditions of university professors in Brazil.	48 reports

Source: Research data (2025).

It is worth noting that all documents used in the data collection and analysis are in the public domain and, therefore, freely accessible to researchers.

The choice of content analysis proposed by Saldaña (2009) was deemed pertinent, as it proposes a coding process that prioritizes the analysis of emotions in the discourse of the interviewees. This type of analysis represents a set of two coding cycles performed by the researcher, who captures “codes” throughout the analyzed material (interview transcripts, images, videos, artifacts, among others). A code is a

word or short phrase that symbolically assigns attributes to the material being considered (Saldaña, 2009).

In the first coding cycle, portions of the material were analyzed and the first codes were assigned. Due to the objectives of this article, the use of emotion codes was deemed pertinent, which “labels the emotions remembered and/or experienced by the research participant” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 86). In light of the theoretical framework used, situations were identified in which the interviewees demonstrated their work passion for teaching. This occurred explicitly, when the interviewees mentioned the words “passion” and “passionate,” but also in moments of their speeches that addressed the characteristics of passionate professionals, especially in the sections where teachers identified with their work.

In this first cycle, the emotion of work passion was identified in the following codes: “passion for teaching,” “passion for research,” “passion for outreach,” “passion for management,” “routines that strengthen work passion,” and “routines that weaken work passion.” It should be noted that, at this stage, the literature served to guide the meaning of work passion, but the codes related to work passion were not pre-established. Furthermore, since the background for identifying the interviewees’ work passion was their processes of identification with teaching work, three codes were pre-established, in light of Mockler (2011), and thus, the transcripts were also analyzed in order to distinguish the interview excerpts related to the codes “professional context,” “personal experience,” and “external political environment.”

In the second cycle of emotion code coding, the researcher “[...] develops a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and/or theoretical organization from their set of codes from the first cycle” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). Thus, the created coding was analyzed, organizing the codes into more agglutinated categories in order to give meaning to the holistic analysis of the data. The categories that emerged from this second coding cycle were: “origins of the teaching profession”; “meanings of the teaching profession”; “work-life balance”; “challenges throughout the teaching profession” and “persistence in the teaching profession”. After the two coding cycles, the material was examined.

The choice of emotion code coding proved to be connected to the object of study, since both work passion and teacher identity are phenomena traversed by

affective experiences (Lourenço *et al.*, 2024). Emotions were not treated merely as individual manifestations, but as analytical indicators of the processes of identification, disidentification, and professional persistence. Thus, the emotions expressed were relevant to understanding how teachers internalize teaching work as part of their identity, even in adverse contexts. The analysis and discussion of the results will be presented below.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The analysis of the empirical material resulted in the emergence of central analytical categories, constructed from two cycles of emotional coding, as proposed by Saldaña (2009). These categories express different dimensions of the teacher identification process and the experience of work passion in adverse contexts, articulating emotions, meanings attributed to work, and career permanence strategies. The categories analyzed and discussed, which will be presented below, were: (1) the multiple meanings of “being a teacher”; (2) the work-life balance of the passionate teacher; (3) collective perceptions of what it means to “be a teacher”, revealing the challenges and suffering in the exercise of teaching; and (4) “being a teacher”: persist or give up?

In order to make the results section more organized and didactic, Table 4 presents a summary of the main findings, highlighting the analytical categories, the meanings attributed to teaching work, and the contributions of the study.

THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF “BEING A TEACHER”

By presenting themselves as passionate and discussing their experiences of being a teacher, the interviewees aligned themselves with the core of what Vallerand *et al.* (2003) discuss, especially when the authors seek to conceptualize work passion with the element of identity highlighted for the understanding and practice of this phenomenon, originating from the emotional field. In this sense, the conception of being a teacher is intertwined with the identity of the interviewees to the point that there are reports that the idea of being a teacher is linked to their own identity, noting a fusion of their personal and professional identities, as shown below:

Table 4. Dimensions of work passion and teaching identity in adverse contexts.

Analytical category	Main areas of interpretation	Most common emotions	Analytical contributions of the study
(1) The multiple meanings of "being a teacher"	Teaching appears as an integral part of "who I am"; it involves inspiring, being a role model, and taking responsibility for the students' education. The teaching profession is described as a process of symbolic and material transformation, traversed by different areas of involvement (teaching, research, and management).	Enthusiasm, satisfaction, pride, a sense of belonging, and personal fulfillment.	It highlights the centrality of faculty identity and shows that work passion is expressed in diverse ways in university work activities.
(2) The work-life balance of the passionate teacher	Passion for work coexists with overload, difficulty disconnecting, and challenges in balancing work and family life. Redefining boundaries often occurs after signs of burnout or illness.	Tiredness, anxiety, frustration, and guilt, accompanied by relief when priorities are reorganized.	It highlights the tension between a more balanced passion and patterns of overwork, intensified by adverse institutional contexts.
(3) Collective perceptions of what it means to "be a teacher"	Faculty members share perceptions of social and institutional devaluation. Their work is often reduced to the idea of "giving classes," making research, management, and outreach invisible. Budget cuts, internal conflicts, and inadequate compensation reinforce this scenario.	Discouragement, exhaustion, irritation, worry, and insecurity.	It broadens the analysis of teacher identity by incorporating collective perceptions and elements of the political-institutional context.
(4) "Being a teacher": persist or give up?	Even in the face of difficulties, the decision to remain in teaching prevails. Persistence is understood as resistance, commitment to public education, and confronting the adversities of the current context.	Resilience, hope, motivation, and a sense of purpose, coexisting with fatigue and frustration.	It demonstrates that career retention results from a continuous process of identification sustained by work passion.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

For me, “being a teacher” is no different from who I am. After ten years in teaching, I feel like a teacher is an integral part of myself. It was a choice, and I even have to moderate myself because sometimes when I’m talking to someone, it feels like I’m in a classroom, that voice... That’s not ideal all the time. (E1).

In this sense, it was possible to understand the teachers’ work passion by realizing that teaching is not just an occupation that they enjoy and dedicate themselves to, nor a temporary function in their lives. Instead, teaching is configured as a striking characteristic of their professional identity, becoming an internalized attribute (Vallerand, 2010; Landin, 2024).

In addition to the clear sense of identity, most of the interviewees associated the understanding of “being a teacher” with the relationship with students in different ways, highlighting the teacher-student bond as an essential element for their teaching experience. The meaning of being a teacher is intrinsically linked to a deep feeling of work passion, which manifests itself mainly in the interaction with students. As an example, six teachers highlighted that “being a teacher” means being a reference or inspiration for students, representing a figure of professional dedication and appreciation for knowledge.

For me, being a teacher means being a role model, the first word that comes to mind immediately. Because we, as teachers, bring a wealth of experience, especially from what we teach, from our career experience – in my case, from the market – and when I teach about this, we end up being a role model for our students, including in terms of values. We need to emphasize this to our students so that they understand not only the examples they can take from certain professional role models, but also from life. (E3).

It is clear that teachers, as passionate masters of their profession, can also inspire students with their work passion by serving as examples of successful professionals, inspiring them to follow similar paths of professional effort (Li; Zhang; Yang, 2017), leading them to achieve better professional prospects and quality of life. It is in this behavior of leadership and positive influence on students that part of the sense of social contribution that the passionate teachers interviewed possess lies (Mirshojaee et al., 2019). Following this line of thought, the explanations of teachers E4 and E23 regarding the meaning of “being a teacher” are presented below, which involves the idea of being an inspiration and a motivating force in the lives of students:

People say they are very inspired by my story, by my passion for teaching and research. Currently, I've received a lot of positive feedback, which is great when I'm willing to do research, participate in theses and projects, go to the middle of the Amazon, two hours by boat in the middle of the Tapajós River. People give very positive feedback; this role model they see in me shows me that I'm on the right track. (E4).

If I were to sum it up in one word, 'being a teacher' would be 'inspiration'. I think that, in a way, a teacher ends up being a showcase. I'll cite examples that happen to me, because a teacher is an inspiration. Fundamentally, I remember that my academic choices were influenced by teachers who inspired me; for example, I had more of an affinity for finance, but my master's and doctoral studies were in marketing because the professors who inspired me, whom I liked, worked in marketing. [...] I would say that for me, the teacher's job is to inspire people, but the teacher also has the job of inspiring the student to do their activities with pleasure. (E23).

For other interviewees, "being a teacher" was represented by a sense of responsibility towards the student, especially because it is a job focused on their professional and civic development. Therefore, the teachers expressed that the result of the knowledge built in the classroom is intimately linked to the high quality of professionals graduating from the university and entering the job market. Regarding this subject, it is possible to highlight:

It's a feeling of responsibility, of caring for the students, being responsible for their future, being there and they will always remember you, because you caused a transformation in their lives, for some not so much, but for others in a very significant way [...] So I would say that being a teacher is a responsible passion, but I think it's about responsibility and care, concern. (E24).

This sense of responsibility is related to the meaning attributed, for example, by teacher E6 to the meaning of being a teacher, which is linked to the idea of social contribution: "[...] it is to help society itself, the external community, in some way. It is an element of gratification, knowing that you are contributing to the development of society is rewarding." (E6).

"Being a teacher" was also explained by eight interviewees as a possibility for transformation, which has two connotations. Firstly, there is a transformation of the student due to the continuous construction of a body of knowledge, culminating in the formation of students into competent professionals and conscious citizens. In this sense, teacher E13 emphasizes that the teacher also undergoes a transforma-

tion in the teaching-learning process, as they also have the opportunity to learn and become more experienced: “Being a teacher is something transformative, it was something that transformed my life, it is an object of transformation [...], it transforms everyone, it is a collective transformation” (E13).

The second connotation refers to a material transformation, since “being a teacher” makes it possible to contribute to the completion of students’ formal undergraduate education, which gives them the possibility of finding better jobs and transforming their precarious reality into a situation with a better quality of life.

Being a teacher means being an agent of transformation. This identity became clearer to me when I began to perceive the financial differences among my students: differences in income, difficulties in their education, and their desire to improve their lives. It’s ambition. This is because most of my students were basically the first in their families to have an education, the possibility of entering university, many facing severe hardship just to rent a house and, ultimately, obtain a minimum level of education. The figure of the teacher has this characteristic of being a transformative force. Of course, the student will be alone, will have to overcome barriers, but the teacher, as an intermediary in this process, is present at some point, in my opinion. (E6).

It is worth highlighting that, throughout their careers, the very act of working as professors has helped in the construction of their teaching identity and their work passion, leading them to greater curiosity, enthusiasm, and willingness to engage with different facets of teaching. Not infrequently, during their statements, the interviewees demonstrated a greater inclination towards research, teaching, or management (only one professor showed great interest in outreach).

Thus, statements such as “I am a researcher” (E17 and E24); “I am a professor and manager at the university” (E12 and E23); “I am a professor and I love the classroom” (E11 and E20); “I am very passionate about teaching” (E1) and “I am totally passionate about teaching, I do it because I love it” (E2) are clear examples of passionate professors, but there may be subcategories of passions that make up the multiple activities of university teaching work itself. That is, not all teachers are passionate about the same activities, since each one goes through unique identification processes, embedded in their historical, social and economic context (Mockler, 2011; Landin, 2024).

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF A PASSIONATE TEACHER

The beginning of teaching activity was, according to the interviewees, surpassed by the challenges that accompany the routine of a teacher throughout their career. The most relevant topic in this subject was the possibility of balancing the activities that guide teaching practice and other activities of personal life – which is foreseen in the studies of Vallerand et al. (2003) and Vallerand (2010), when they characterize harmonious passion. This subject, referring to a search for work-life balance, is linked to the perspective of personal experience, defended by Mockler (2011) in the construction of teacher identity, representing the set of activities carried out by teachers outside their profession, but which contribute to their identity formation.

The teachers who participated in this study stated that, at some point in their teaching career, they placed excessive emphasis on the activities of their profession due to demands of their context, a situation that was characterized as a lack of balance. In the experience of participant E1, this occurred when she assumed a management position at the university, which lasted two years. She recounted that she was warned by family members that she was working too much and, after two years, she realized that balance had been restored. In a similar situation, Professor E5 explained that his family “paid the price” for his absence and difficulty in balancing his multiple demands and, therefore, he needed to do a self-assessment of his priorities:

My family always paid the price. I took every class I could, I wanted to do different projects, the boys wanted to participate in an event and nobody wanted to take them, so I wrote a project proposal to take them. And then my daughter saw me very little: when I was home, I was working. My husband also works here and he said I went overboard. And the return wasn't always as much as I thought I was giving. [...] That's why today I want to put something else at the center of my life, to focus on the emotional aspect, on giving back, on giving, on my family, friends, my personal life, without focusing solely on my professional life. (E5).

It was noted that the difficulty in finding a balance between life and work – in trying to reconcile professional duties and family care – was not expressed only by female teachers, as presented in the studies by Galvão, Ferreira and Costa (2022) and Wan et al. (2022). For example, in the view of teacher E21, who combines the roles

of teacher and father, measuring this balance is a challenge, since his tendency is to invest more time in his teaching activities. However, he constantly seeks to identify when and to what extent he should dedicate himself to the required activities:

From my point of view, I think so, I've been trying to balance it. But it's difficult to know the right measure of each thing. Having time to be with my daughter and my wife is my number one priority, but I still have to manage this issue. Every day I have to manage it; I can't immerse myself too much in work because we have this tendency to be immersed in work. (E21).

It was observed that the simultaneous accumulation of the roles of fatherhood/motherhood and teaching was a significant aspect in the experience of the interviewees, becoming a relevant reference in the personal trajectory of some professionals (Mockler, 2011). This accumulation generates overload, negatively impacting professional performance, even though these are teachers who are admittedly passionate about their work, from the conceptual perspective of Vallerand et al. (2003).

For the teachers interviewed, the attempt to establish moments of rest more assertively only occurred after facing health problems, such as thrombosis, stroke, depression, and burnout. As an example, E22 shared: "I think that for a long time I didn't understand that rest and leisure were also my rights. Slowing down was very difficult, to the point that, in 2015, I had a thrombosis. It was a milestone in my life that showed me the need to slow down." (E22).

It is noteworthy that the experience of teaching was not described in a linearly positive way by the interviewees. The difficulty in balancing work activities with other areas of life – such as family, friends, and self-care – was identified as a challenge by most participants. Serious health problems, such as anxiety attacks, depression, stroke, and thrombosis, when directly associated with work-related factors, may be indicative of the development of an obsessive passion for work (Vallerand et al., 2003; Astakhova et al., 2022; Chichekian & Vallerand, 2022).

In this context, the external pressures reported by the teachers themselves may have led to the compulsive internalization of work as part of their identity (Vallerand, 2010, 2016). Among the factors mentioned are the excess of bureaucratic tasks, large volumes of content preparation and updating, conflicting relationships

with students and colleagues, as well as the demands related to scientific production. These issues are exemplified in the accounts of teacher E7, who felt pressured to keep up with research activities to the point of suffering a stroke, and teacher E26, who states that she has boundless passion for her work.

In research, you always have to be looking for something; you never stop. I understand that this logic made me sick. When I had this logic and saw that it was almost causing my body and mind to shut down, that's when I changed my way of working, and it really changed everything. I needed to have a stroke to balance things in my life. I don't work on weekends at all; I'm strict about that, only if it's something very important. (E7).

When we talk about passion at work, we always think it's something a person does without limits, without logic, without reasoning, capable of sacrificing their life or ambitions for a passion. I'm capable of sacrificing my Sundays, my vacations, a family outing for work... I've done it several times. Besides sacrificing, it's about feeling free. That's passion, it's sacrificing and still feeling like you're doing it right, doing it well. [...] I would even pay to work, this passion has no limits [...] Now I can live better, but for a long time I couldn't, especially in terms of physical activity, when things get tough you stop training. But my profession and other activities are still unbalanced, because the gym is where I spend most of my energy. (E26).

Certainly, the tendency of teachers, when facing these pressures, was to focus excessively on work, adopting a behavior of rigid persistence associated with obsessive passion (Chichekian & Vallerand, 2022). They reported that, although they achieved some successful professional results, they neglected other aspects of their lives, which culminated in serious physical and emotional illnesses. The interviewees' accounts of illness stem from an adverse context marked by intense productivity pressures, along with the need to perform multiple functions simultaneously.

COLLECTIVE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO "BE A TEACHER"

Although they were not interviewed simultaneously – and therefore did not know each other's answers – the interviewees addressed points about the teaching career that are shared by this group of professionals, forming a set of collective perceptions about what it means to be a university professor in the context of Brazilian public universities. These collective perceptions about teaching are, in general, the result of the perspective of the "external political environment" in the construction of teaching identity, as advocated by Mockler (2011). This perspective refers to the

discourses, attitudes, and socially conceived representations in relation to education and teachers.

It was observed, from the interviewees' statements, that there is a social discourse that attributes importance to education and teachers in Brazil. However, some interviewees recognize that this favorable position towards the educational system is not sustained in practice. This is reflected, above all, in the lack of appreciation stemming from a poor understanding of the true role of the teacher, who seems to have reduced prestige or relevance in the eyes of society, resulting in their devaluation, as explained by teachers E11 and E6.

In reality, in society as a whole, teachers are not valued. Their importance is acknowledged, but they receive no recognition whatsoever. The responsibility of educating children is shifted to schools and universities, with the belief that education is the teacher's responsibility, not the parents'. There's a transfer of responsibility from society to academia, where we are supposed to educate students to become citizens, and we don't have that responsibility. But it's not just the university; it's the collective responsibility to form citizens. (E11).

In society, teaching is an undervalued profession, due to a lack of understanding of its importance, especially in universities. This is because part of society doesn't attend university; they don't engage with it, they don't know it, they have a notion but don't understand what a teacher does, and perhaps even the students don't grasp it. The idea of a teacher is fragmented. This situation regarding the teaching profession is somewhat detrimental. (E6).

Along these lines, some professors highlighted the multiple facets of university teaching – teaching, research, outreach, and management – emphasizing that, mistakenly, students (and society) believe that “being a professor” only encompasses the function of teaching, that is, that it boils down to “just giving lectures” – even though preparing lectures requires intense work. This limited understanding of university teaching work represents a form of devaluation of these professionals, to the point that “being a professor” is not even considered a legitimate profession.

[...]They think that all it takes is showing up in the classroom and that's it, that's what being a teacher is all about. They forget the entire journey required to become a teacher and, often, what they give up to be there, giving their best in the classroom. I think that, often, they only see that moment and don't consider teaching as a profession. They ask me what my profession is besides being a teacher.” [laughter]. (E18)

Regarding the “research” aspect in the context of teaching work, the interviewees shared a collective perception that there is a certain devaluation of research work and researchers in universities, evidenced, above all, by the increasing cuts in funding for research. This situation directly impacts lower investment volumes for scientific production in universities (Vieira & Moreno, 2022; Almeida, 2022) and, consequently, the demotivation of researchers. When announced, these budget cuts in universities generated commotion in the academic community and, not infrequently, resulted in protests across Brazil, as occurred in 2022 (Sapio & De Luca, 2022). On this subject, E11 reported:

In recent years, I've become a bit more skeptical, but that will change at the university. We have problems with budget cuts. When I entered university, I received assistance to participate in events in Brazil and abroad; it was a very exciting time at the university, and in the last five years, it's been downhill. It has brought demotivation in that sense, but I hope that this can be overcome. (E11).

Regarding academic management, the interviewees also discussed a recurring situation that permeates the university faculty itself: the various power struggles. These struggles are established over the years according to the specific interests of groups of professors, as the following interviewee explained:

I think it's important to mention that the partnership with colleagues is crucial in boosting our teaching careers. There are many difficulties because we have differing viewpoints among the professors in our department. These differences, these conflicts that occur—which perhaps wouldn't even need to happen given the diversity of thought—end up discouraging us from even going to the university, participating in meetings, and planning sessions. (E10).

Another clear demonstration of an incoherent discourse on the value of education, which can be seen from the analysis of the “external political environment” dimension (Mockler, 2011), is the progressive reduction of funds allocated to HEIs in recent years. This is one of the problems plaguing Brazilian public universities – and which has directly affected the work of teachers, limiting the performance of teachers and public managers, mainly in terms of paying basic operating expenses of universities, such as water, electricity, outsourced services, as well as research and extension grants (Professores..., 2019; Palhares, 2022; Arantes; Smaili; Minhoto, 2022).

Regarding salary issues, there was practically unanimous agreement that remuneration does not represent fair compensation for the intellectual work performed, especially considering the time invested in master's and doctoral degrees for the qualification of professionals in university teaching in Brazil, as explained below:

[...] The lack of recognition, the low salary, but if you stop to think about it, it's not worth it, it's very little. Sometimes we take money out of our own pockets to make materials. Unfortunately, the public service leaves much to be desired, with more and more budget cuts. The lack of investment, the lack of appreciation for teaching, is negative. (E8).

We don't do this work for the money, because we earn little, better than other teachers. But how long does it take to get here? If you calculate it, it's a lifetime, it's a quarter of your life to get in, the economic benefit you receive isn't worth a quarter of your life." (E9).

Finally, in the context of limited budgets in public universities, respondents also mentioned the lack of recognition of teaching work, reflected in outdated remuneration (Rocha, Melo, & Silva, 2022; Meirelles et al., 2024). This collective perception aligns with research conducted in public higher education institutions in recent years, which points to the salary gap for faculty compared to other public servants who enter the career with only an undergraduate degree – while the teaching career requires, at a minimum, a master's or doctoral degree.

“BEING A TEACHER”: TO PERSIST OR TO GIVE UP?

Despite the adverse context reported by the teachers during the interviews, the participants mentioned both positive aspects and challenges related to the practice of university teaching, expressing feelings of gratification and suffering associated with the profession. However, when directly questioned about the possibility of giving up their teaching career, the answer was practically unanimous: “no”. The sense of persistence among the interviewees was analyzed as a continuous process of identification with the teaching career, as opposed to disidentification.

Thus, instead of perceiving themselves as individuals who do not belong to the teaching professional group (Dukerich, Kramer & Parks, 1998), the participants demonstrated that they had internalized different experiences related to their personal perspectives, the professional context, and the external political environment

(Mockler, 2011). This process contributed to the development of a sense of self-affirmation and self-recognition, characterizing a process of identification (Astakhova & Porter, 2015). In this context, teacher E21 classified the practice of teaching as an act of resistance in the face of the difficulties faced by teachers.

Today, for me, 'being a teacher' is an act of resistance, because today teachers are persecuted. We are in a moment of undervaluing teachers, a moment of distrust in science, and a 30 million reais cut to the institution's budget. [...] I think that at this moment I see this: we have great difficulty seeing the teacher as wise, as someone who transmits part of the knowledge, learns from the student, that respect for being the person who teaches another person. We are lacking these things and, for me, at the moment being a teacher is this: it's being an agent of change and it's being blocked, it needs to be better valued. (E21).

The "moment of distrust in science" mentioned above is directly linked to the contemporary social context in Brazil. At the height of the search for the creation and application of immunizers against COVID-19, following the global movement to contain the high number of deaths caused by the virus, there was a great dissemination of fake news about scientific research and vaccines developed from 2020 onwards (Ribeiro, 2021; Ferraz, 2022). This scenario of distrust in the methodological rigor of science contributed to the devaluation of the work of scientists and university professors involved in research. In the long term, this distrust, combined with other economic and social factors, can lead to the stagnation of scientific development in Brazil.

The devaluation of professors, reflected in inadequate remuneration – as discussed earlier – was highlighted by Professor E8 as one of the obstacles faced in the profession, but one that did not discourage him from continuing in the career:

[...] There are problems in the public sector, the financial conditions are poor, and the salaries are not adequate compared to what is paid in private universities and in other countries. But if you love what you do, you overcome these difficulties. (E8).

Professor E17's statement summarizes the position of several interviewees regarding "being a professor," demonstrating that persistence in university teaching, despite the difficulties, is directly associated with the pursuit of transformative and socially contributory education:

I didn't want to give up because I strongly believe in the profession. We are here precisely to change, to break the paradigms of this reality, to not accept these attacks on education, to unite efforts against these cases, these setbacks we have had in education. On the contrary, instead of being discouraged, I have even more desire to fight for education. (E17).

The “attacks on education” mentioned above are associated with the scenario of political polarization in Brazil, as explained by Ortellado, Ribeiro, and Zeine (2022). This situation has impacted higher education through attempts to curtail academic freedom in universities and restrictions on the performance of professors (Fonseca, 2022). In addition, the recent phenomenon of scientific denialism has challenged the legitimacy of academic work, casting doubt on the meticulous effort of university researchers and scientists (Ribeiro, 2021).

The accounts of the interviewees indicate that the social and economic context in which they are embedded plays a significant role in understanding their work passion (Vallerand et al. 2024; Vallerand, 2010; Vallerand & Houlfort, 2019). This is justified by the fact that some of the situations mentioned repeatedly directly influence the performance of teaching work, leading to the experience of negative emotions such as frustration, fatigue, and anxiety (Segarra & Williams, 2025; Dos Santos & Christofoletti, 2025).

In this context, two types of problems emerge. The first involves issues under the purview of university management, such as interpersonal conflicts between colleagues, demands for scientific productivity, and excessive bureaucratic activities. A healthy work environment becomes, in this case, an essential factor in the construction of the teacher's identity, as it can offer emotional and practical support. Conversely, more restrictive environments tend to generate feelings of isolation and lack of support (Van Lankveld et al., 2017).

The second type involves institutional challenges that require solutions from higher authorities, demanding federal investments, such as the precariousness of university infrastructure, the scarcity of funding for academic projects, and the salary gap for teachers. Factors external to the university also influence the teacher's identity, especially by enabling research and professional development programs, which directly impacts the valuation of these professionals (Van Lankveld et al., 2017).

Both types of challenges – related to university management and of an institutional nature – are seen by teachers as an integral part of teaching work and understood as fundamental elements of their professional experience (Mockler, 2011). Thus, the difficulties reported by the interviewees are part of their learning and development, along with the positive experiences of the profession.

This is not a mistaken interpretation that teachers enjoy facing difficulties or prefer to remain in a challenging profession. However, it is precisely in the internalization of teaching work as an essential part of their identity – including both the positive aspects and the challenges – that work passion is identified (Vallerand et al., 2003; Astakhova & Porter, 2015). This feeling, which involves a strong emotional component, directs the intentions and behaviors of teachers. These accounts indicate that work passion manifests itself not only as enthusiasm for teaching, but as a process of identity construction in which “being a teacher” becomes inseparable from “being a person.” In the context of university teaching, passion is sustained by continuous processes of identification, even when accompanied by suffering and overload.

In this sense, passionate teachers tend to demonstrate greater emotional resilience, seeking to balance teaching with other personal activities. Consequently, they are more likely to remain in the profession with commitment and responsibility (Vallerand et al., 2024; Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016), despite facing suffering resulting from an adverse context.

Final Considerations

The objective of this article was achieved insofar as it was possible to analyze the identification process of Brazilian university professors in administration courses with their teaching work and its relationship with work passion in adverse contexts. It was identified that work passion is constructed in the professors’ experiences within the three perspectives of identification processes advocated by Mockler (2011): professional context, personal experience, and external political environment. Professors experience positive aspects, such as constant learning, interaction with students, a sense of personal fulfillment and social contribution, and negative aspects,

such as intense workload, demands for productivity, and outdated remuneration, throughout their professional development, especially in recent years, due to the socio-political context.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This research contributes to the literature on workpassion by deepening the investigation regarding the element of identity and teaching work, which is emphasized in the work of Vallerand et al. (2024). It was noted that the workpassion of teachers was nurtured throughout their professional trajectory through the internalization of multiple experiences focused on teaching, research, extension, and management activities, as well as through interaction with students and colleagues. The set of these experiences provided the interviewees with the sense of personal and professional fulfillment expected in passionate teachers. Thus, work passion was perceived as a relevant element in the identification process, functioning as a motivating feeling that has helped teachers persist in their professional goals, without giving up on the profession.

In addition, it was observed that the interviewees expressed that their workpassion has developed amidst the existence of a discourse that education and teachers are important for Brazil. However, it is clear that this position does not hold up in practice, especially when considering the devaluation of teachers through outdated salaries and low investments in research and infrastructure at universities.

For teaching practice, this research clarifies for the faculty the meaning of work passion and how it relates to the construction of professional identity. Teachers are then able to recognize themselves as passionate or not about their work and to identify how their passion was built throughout their career, through the identification processes worked on: personal experience, professional context and external political environment.

Thus, this study contributes theoretically by deepening the role of identity as a central mechanism for sustaining work passion, advancing the dualistic model by empirically evidencing the identification processes that anchor the passion for teaching work throughout the professional trajectory. (2) By articulating work passion and teacher identity in an adverse context, the study contributes to understanding why passion for work does not imply an absence of suffering, but can operate as an

identity resource that sustains permanence in teaching. (3) Theoretically, the study broadens the debate by articulating work passion and disidentification, showing that passion for teaching acts as a force of identity resistance in the face of contexts that could lead to symbolic distancing from the profession. (4) By integrating work passion, teaching identity, and disidentification, the study broadens the understanding of the paradoxical nature of passion for work, which coexists with suffering, resistance, and professional persistence. (5) The study contributes methodologically by demonstrating the relevance of emotional coding as an analytical strategy for understanding the intersection between emotions, identity, and work passion in teaching.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Regarding organizational practice, this research provides subsidies for public managers — both internal and external to the university — to seek solutions relevant to institutional and extra-institutional problems directly related to the adverse contexts of the academic environment. This effort can materialize, for example, in the creation and implementation of public policies aimed at investments in the infrastructure of public universities, in the acquisition of permanent and consumable materials necessary for the didactic support of students, as well as in the planning of funding for research projects, including all the costs of production and dissemination of scientific knowledge. In addition, the need to increase public policies to support teaching, research and extension is highlighted, with the aim of fostering academic production through international partnerships and research grants with values compatible with national and international standards.

As concrete implications for “Teacher and Researcher Training” and for “Teaching Action and the Learning Environment”, the study points to the need to create institutional care devices, such as psychological support programs, revision of productivity criteria and more balanced policies for the distribution of workload. Furthermore, understanding teacher identity can more consistently guide the formulation of professional development programs.

Given the temporal and continuous nature of the construction of teacher identity and, consequently, the internalization of work passion in the individual’s identity, it is suggested that future research analyze the identification processes of university

professors and their relationships with work passion from a longitudinal observational perspective. This would allow for interviews to be conducted throughout the professionals' careers, enabling the chronological identification of the nuances in the construction of teacher identity and work passion.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Furthermore, considering that teacher identity and work passion are social constructs, it is suggested that future studies be conducted using methods that allow the researcher to be embedded in the life and work context of teachers, such as ethnography and ethnomethodology. In this way, the aim is to observe and understand the multiple behaviors of teachers in their social, political, and economic environment, taking into account their social interactions and the collective understanding of their teacher identity and work passion.

Thus, the research shows that, even in the face of adversities such as low pay, pressure for productivity, and attacks on academic freedom, teachers remain in the profession driven by a commitment to education and social transformation. Despite this adverse scenario, the interviewees demonstrated a strong sense of identification with teaching work and work passion, which reinforces their permanence and resilience in the profession. However, the continuity of university professors in their careers must be strengthened through public and institutional policies that guarantee adequate conditions for the exercise of teaching, ensuring that their permanence does not depend exclusively on individual effort.

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