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Research skills and pedagogical innovation: a systematic review

Habilidades investigativas e innovación pedagógica: una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

University faculty research skills are a strategic factor in transforming teaching practices; however, gaps remain regarding the mechanisms linking their development to pedagogical innovation in Latin American contexts. This study aimed to examine the relationship between faculty research skills and pedagogical innovation in higher education institutions through a systematic document review following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Twenty-one articles were analyzed, selected from a pool of 198 records retrieved from Scopus and SciELO (2021–2026). The results reveal four cross-cutting findings: research self-efficacy acts as a mediator of pedagogical change; formative research serves as the bridge transforming inquiry into didactic transformation; continuous professional development and institutional support significantly moderate this relationship; and contexts with heavy teaching loads limit the transfer of research competencies to the classroom. The study concludes that strengthening research skills does not autonomously generate pedagogical innovation but rather requires enabling institutional conditions and training programs aligned with actual teaching practice.

Keywords: Research skills, pedagogical innovation, higher education.

Resumen

Las habilidades investigativas del profesorado universitario constituyen un factor estratégico para la transformación de las prácticas de enseñanza; sin embargo, persisten vacíos en torno a los mecanismos que articulan su desarrollo con la innovación pedagógica en contextos latinoamericanos. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar la relación entre las habilidades investigativas docentes y la innovación pedagógica en instituciones de educación superior, mediante una revisión documental sistemática bajo los lineamientos PRISMA 2020. Se analizaron 21 artículos seleccionados de un universo de 198 registros recuperados en Scopus y SciELO (2021-2026). Los resultados revelan cuatro hallazgos transversales: la autoeficacia investigativa actúa como mediador del cambio pedagógico; la investigación formativa constituye el puente que convierte la indagación en transformación didáctica; la formación continua y el respaldo institucional moderan de forma determinante dicha relación; y los contextos con alta carga docente limitan la transferencia de competencias investigativas al aula. Se concluye que el fortalecimiento de habilidades investigativas no produce innovación pedagógica de manera autónoma, sino que requiere condiciones institucionales habilitantes y programas de formación articulados al ejercicio docente real.

Palabras clave: Habilidades investigativas, innovación pedagógica, educación superior.

Introduction

Few tasks within the university carry as much weight as preparing faculty who are equipped to conduct research. Puche-Villalobos and Acosta-Faneite (2025), drawing on a study of 150 instructors of research seminars and methodology courses across ten South American countries, show that the development of research competencies depends as much on faculty members' academic and pedagogical preparation as on the institutional conditions that sustain research activity. The trouble is that the reality of

university classrooms tends to lag behind this demand. Álvarez Ochoa et al. (2020), working with a sample of 24 university instructors assessed through a 72-item instrument spanning seven dimensions, found that the greatest difficulties arose in the operational tasks of research work itself, data tabulation, the selection of appropriate statistical tests, and the rigorous formulation of the research problem. For structural and empirical reasons, university faculty stand out as one of the groups most exposed to this gap: heavy teaching loads and a weak institutional research culture compound the pattern documented by Barros Bastidas and Turpo Gebera (2020), who identified a positive relationship between faculty research training and scientific output.

The literature on research skills and pedagogical innovation converges on a single point: formulating questions, gathering and analyzing data, and reflecting systematically on one's own practice are competencies that surface again and again as the central finding. From Moreira et al.'s (2023) perspective, these competencies function as cross-cutting axes of teaching performance in higher education. Andrades Moya et al. (2024), in a systematic review of 29 Scopus articles on higher education teaching, identify a persistent demand for better articulation between research and teaching at both the pedagogical and institutional levels. Taking a multifactorial approach, Puche-Villalobos and Acosta-Faneite (2025) show that tutors' academic preparation, institutional culture, and available resources all shape how research competencies develop and transfer into teaching practice. Barros Bastidas and Turpo Gebera (2020) likewise note that doctoral training and sustained participation in research projects are associated with greater faculty scientific output. The picture is not entirely linear, however. Salguero Rosero and Pérez Barral (2023) find that in institutions with heavy teaching loads and a weak research culture, pedagogical innovation ends up relying more on accumulated professional experience than on formal research practice. Briones Mera et al. (2024) argue that continuous training and institutional support act as moderating factors in this relationship, although the precise mechanism through which they do so remains only partially established.

Even so, this body of literature has gaps worth pinpointing precisely, because those very gaps are what justify the present study. The first concerns geographic representation: nearly all of the available research has been conducted in generic university settings, with little attention paid to the specific educational realities of the Latin American region. According to Mansutti Rodríguez et al. (2023), of the 2,193 articles indexed in Scopus on educational research in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, only 928, fewer than half, could be analyzed in depth by authorship, educational level, and methodology, which already says something about how systematic this line of inquiry has actually been in the country. The second gap is methodological: few studies treat research skills and pedagogical innovation as interrelated variables. According to Andrades Moya et al. (2024), in their Scopus review, most designs treat research and higher education teaching as separate compartments, almost always using cross-sectional approaches that preclude any discussion of causal relationships between the two constructs. This is the space that the present documentary review, grounded in the PRISMA method and drawing on 21 studies, sets out to begin filling.

Closing this gap matters for two reasons, one more theoretical and the other more practical. On the conceptual side, the study extends the model linking faculty research skills to pedagogical innovation, adding categories such as critical thinking, self-efficacy, and research culture to an interpretive framework suited to the Latin American context. For Villegas Ardiles and Chavez Solis (2026), strengthening faculty research skills has direct effects on self-efficacy and self-regulation, categories that function as preconditions for pedagogical innovation. On the practical side, the findings of this review can inform the design of continuing-education programs and institutional policies aimed at strengthening faculty research competencies at higher education institutions across the region.

All of this leads to the objective of the present study: to examine the relationship between faculty research skills and pedagogical innovation in higher education institutions through a systematic

documentary review built on PRISMA guidelines. The hypothesis guiding this inquiry is that greater development of faculty research skills is associated with higher levels of innovation in pedagogical practice, and that continuing education acts as a moderating factor in that relationship. To get there, the article proceeds in four stages: this introduction, the methodological development of the search and document-selection process, the presentation of results, and, finally, the discussion of findings.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach to documentary synthesis. As Quintero and Vizcaíno (2023) note, systematic review allows researchers to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize the scientific literature through explicit, reproducible procedures. On this basis, the systematic literature review was adopted as the research method, given that this design favors transparency, replicability, and consistency in the process of gathering, appraising, and analyzing the evidence (Page et al., 2021). The study unfolded across four successive phases: search, appraisal, analysis, and synthesis.

Search phase

A systematic search was conducted in Scopus and SciELO, with data extraction completed on April 15, 2026, using the following Boolean search strings:

Scopus: ("habilidades investigativas" OR "competencias investigativas" OR "research skills") AND ("innovación pedagógica" OR "pedagogical innovation" OR "práctica docente") AND ("educación superior" OR "higher education" OR "universidad") AND PUBYEAR > 2020

SciELO: ("habilidades investigativas" OR "investigación formativa") AND ("docentes" OR "profesorado") AND ("innovación" OR "práctica pedagógica") AND año: [2021 TO 2026]

A language filter was applied to include articles in both Spanish and English, and the publication window was set between 2021 and 2026 to ensure the currency and thematic relevance of the records retrieved.

Original research articles and review articles published in peer-reviewed, indexed journals were eligible for inclusion; theses, technical reports, and documents that had not undergone peer review were excluded.

Appraisal phase

Titles and abstracts of the 198 retrieved records (Scopus: n = 118; SciELO: n = 80) were screened to confirm their relevance to the study's objective.

Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: availability of full text, a clearly stated methodology, verifiable results, and direct relevance to faculty research skills or pedagogical innovation in higher education.

Articles that did not meet these criteria were discarded, with the reason for exclusion recorded in each case in the extraction matrix.

Analysis phase

The preselected articles were read in full to extract information on methodological design, study population, variables, and each study's central findings.

This information was recorded in an extraction matrix with the following fields: authorship, year of publication, source database, study type, main finding, and emerging thematic category.

Synthesis phase

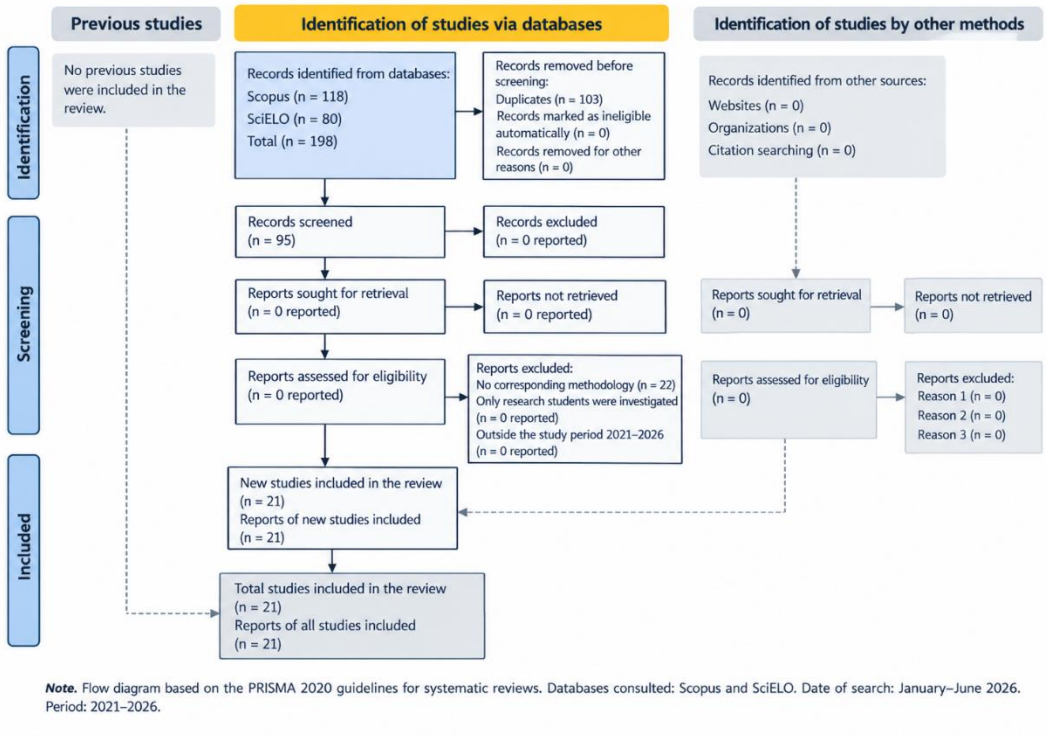
Patterns of convergence, conceptual divergences, and explanatory gaps across the studies in the corpus were identified.

Findings were organized into thematic categories built inductively, from which the interpretive propositions underlying the study's conclusions were formulated.

The analytic corpus was built from 198 records retrieved from Scopus (n = 118) and SciELO (n = 80). As Page et al. (2021) note, a systematic review must state eligibility criteria and reasons for exclusion precisely at every stage so that the process remains auditable and reproducible; following that guideline, the final sample consisted of 21 articles that fully met the established criteria. Of the 198 records identified, 15 duplicates were removed before screening, leaving 183 records to be screened by title and abstract; of these, 109 were excluded for lacking thematic relevance or falling outside the search period, leaving 74 publications to proceed to full-text assessment. At that stage, 53 were excluded for two stated reasons: lack of direct thematic relevance to the study variables (n = 31) and absence of a stated methodology (n = 22). No records were excluded using automated or machine-learning tools; the entire process was carried out through human review (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Results and discussion

Figure 1. *PRISMA flow diagram.*



Note. Flow diagram based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines for systematic reviews. Databases consulted: Scopus and SciELO. Date of search: January–June 2026. Period: 2021–2026.

Note. Documentary selection process based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Databases searched: Scopus and SciELO. Extraction date: April 15, 2026. Period covered: 2021–2026.

The relationship between university faculty research skills and pedagogical innovation processes has drawn growing attention in the recent academic literature, although the mechanisms linking the two variables remain under active scrutiny. Systematic examination of the 21 selected studies made it possible to identify four thematic clusters: research self-efficacy as a mediator of pedagogical change; formative research as the articulating axis of faculty development; continuing education and institutional support as moderating conditions; and contextual tensions that constrain the transfer of research competencies into the classroom.

Table 1. *Summary of studies included in the systematic review (2021–2026).*

Author/Year	Database	Type	Main Finding	Category
Villegas Ardiles y Chavez Solis (2026)	SciELO	Systematic review	Research skills strengthen faculty self-efficacy and self-regulation, triggering sustained cycles of pedagogical improvement.	Teacher self-efficacy
Berrocal Contreras et al. (2024)	SciELO	Mixed methods	Learning communities aligned with curricular planning significantly raise research competencies and teaching quality.	Continuing education
Briones Mera et al. (2024)	Scopus	Documentary	Institutional support and continuous training decisively moderate the relationship between research and pedagogical innovation.	Institutional factors
González & Valencia (2024)	Scopus	Descriptive mixed methods	Over 60% of pre-service teachers report possessing research skills, although their effective pedagogical application requires sustained institutional support.	Pre-service teacher education
Meléndez (2024)	SciELO	Qualitative	Graduate programs with a research emphasis strengthen teaching practice: graduates report greater reflexivity and a broader repertoire of pedagogical strategies.	Graduate-level training
Rodríguez-Ojeda et al. (2024)	Scopus	Systematic review	Professional development oriented toward pedagogical innovation improves educational quality when it integrates reflective, collaborative components grounded in the institutional context.	Pedagogical innovation
Vega Fajardo & Vargas Amézquita (2024)	Scopus	Systematic bibliometric review	Academic, institutional, and motivational factors account for the uneven development of research skills among university faculty.	Research culture
Moreira et al. (2023)	Scopus	Systematic review	Research competencies become established as cross-cutting axes of teaching performance and provide empirical grounding for pedagogical decision-making.	Pedagogical competencies
Salguero Rosero & Pérez Barral (2023)	SciELO	Documentary	Formative research links knowledge transmission, research competencies, and pedagogical innovation, though its management faces structural difficulties.	Formative research
Corona Meza (2023)	SciELO	Systematic review	Formative research in Latin American universities requires explicit curricular articulation and communities of practice to become a genuine pillar of teaching.	Formative research

Author/Year	Database	Type	Main Finding	Category
Arteaga Ponce et al. (2025)	SciELO	Systematic review	Formative research emerges as a key strategy for improving teaching competencies and educational quality, with direct implications for pedagogical innovation.	Teaching competencies
Barros Bastidas & Turpo Gebera (2022)	SciELO	Empirical	Doctoral training and participation in research projects are associated with greater scientific output and with the integration of research into teaching activity.	Scientific output
Dávila Morán et al. (2022)	SciELO	Descriptive	University faculty research skills show a positive correlation with intellectual output, although structural deficits persist at several Peruvian institutions.	Regional diagnostic
Andrades Moya et al. (2024)	SciELO	Systematic review	The review of 29 articles across 17 international contexts identifies the need to integrate research and teaching at the pedagogical, political, student, and social levels.	Research–teaching integration
Serrano et al. (2024)	SciELO	Descriptive	University faculty research competencies show significant gaps linked to the absence of internal policies for scientific promotion and a weak research culture.	Institutional research culture
Puche-Villalobos & Acosta-Faneite (2025)	SciELO	Nonexperimental quantitative	Among 150 South American faculty members, institutional factors and academic preparation show variations that shape the development of research competencies.	Multifactorial determinants
Reyes Narváez & Oyola Canto (2024)	SciELO	Descriptive	Research competencies among health-sciences faculty show moderate levels, with scientific writing and data analysis as the most deficient dimensions.	Competency diagnostic
Castro Sandoval & Silva Monsalve (2023)	SciELO	Action research	A digitally mediated research-skills training program produces sustained improvements in pedagogical practice when combined with ongoing expert feedback.	ICT-mediated training
Beltrán Molina et al. (2022)	SciELO	Quantitative	Faculty performance in research competencies correlates positively with graduate students' attainment of research skills, evidencing a modeling effect.	Faculty research performance

Author/Year	Database	Type	Main Finding	Category
Orama Sánchez & Mena Lorenzo (2022)	SciELO	Qualitative	Developing scientific-research skills among practicing teachers requires differentiated strategies based on prior skill level and institutional context.	Differentiated training
Ochoa Jaramillo (2025)	SciELO	Documentary review	The classification of research competencies in higher education reveals five cross-cutting dimensions—conceptual, methodological, technological, communicative, and ethical—linked to the practice of teaching.	Competency taxonomy

Note. Author's own elaboration from the studies selected using the PRISMA 2020 protocol.

At the theoretical level, research skills reposition the instructor as an active agent in the production and validation of pedagogical knowledge. From the perspective of Villegas Ardiles and Chavez Solis (2026), mastering the competencies needed to formulate context-specific questions, gather information methodically, and reflect on one's own practice generates a sense of self-efficacy among faculty that translates into greater openness to pedagogical experimentation. This view converges with the observation that research competencies provide empirical grounding for pedagogical decisions, fostering cycles of improvement that extend beyond individual work (Moreira et al., 2023). According to Vega Fajardo and Vargas Amézquita (2024), proficiency in data-collection and analysis methods enhances instructors' capacity to diagnose classroom needs, design evidence-based interventions, and evaluate their outcomes with systematic rigor. This taxonomic dimension of research competencies has recently been systematized by Ochoa Jaramillo (2025), who identifies five cross-cutting dimensions, among them the methodological and the ethical, as organizing elements of teaching practice in higher education.

With regard to formative research as an articulating axis, the evidence reviewed shows that this component functions as a pedagogical bridge between systematic inquiry and didactic transformation. Formative research reaches its greatest potential when it is woven transversally throughout training programs, rather than confined to a single, isolated methodology course (Arteaga Ponce et al., 2025). As Corona Meza (2023) points out, within the Latin American university context this component requires explicit curricular articulation and institutionally supported communities of practice in order to become a genuine pillar of teaching work. Managing formative research links the transmission and production of knowledge with the development of research competencies and the renewal of pedagogical practice, although it runs into structural obstacles tied to the absence of clear institutional methodological guidance (Salguero Rosero & Pérez Barral, 2023). Along the same lines, Andrades Moya et al. (2024) conclude that the integration of research and teaching must be consolidated at the pedagogical, political, student, and social levels.

Regarding continuing education and institutional support, the review reveals that these conditions are decisive in determining the extent to which research skills transfer into pedagogical practice. In the view of Berrocal Contreras et al. (2024), faculty learning communities aligned with curricular planning produce significant gains in research competencies, provided they are sustained over time and backed by adequate institutional resources; when they operate intermittently or disconnected from the actual curriculum, their effects shrink to superficial improvements with no lasting pedagogical impact. Similarly, administrative support, protected time for research, and access to specialized academic sources amplify the effect of research competencies on teaching practice (Briones Mera et al., 2024). Rodríguez-Ojeda et al. (2024) contend that professional development oriented toward pedagogical innovation demonstrably improves educational quality when it integrates reflective and collaborative dimensions grounded in the real institutional context. This evidence is reinforced by the finding of Castro Sandoval and Silva Monsalve

(2023) that digitally mediated research-skills training programs yield sustained improvements in pedagogical practice when paired with ongoing expert feedback.

Faculty members' training trajectories emerge as a variable with considerable explanatory power. Instructors who graduate from research-focused postgraduate programs report greater reflexivity about their own practice and a wider range of pedagogical strategies, which positions postgraduate training as a favorable condition for transferring research competencies into the classroom (Meléndez, 2024). Barros Bastidas and Turpo Gebera (2022) show that doctoral training and active, sustained participation in research projects are associated with greater faculty scientific output and with the integration of research into teaching activity. The modeling effect that research-active instructors exert on their students has been documented by Beltrán Molina et al. (2022), who report a positive correlation between faculty performance in research competencies and graduate students' attainment of those same skills. At the pre-service level, over 60% of education students report possessing research skills, although their effective pedagogical application remains insufficient without institutional support that connects those competencies to actual classroom performance (González & Valencia, 2024).

The fourth analytical category, concerning contextual tensions and the limits of transfer, introduces critical nuances that cannot be overlooked. In the assessment of Dávila Morán et al. (2022), the deficits in research competencies that persist among Latin American university faculty are not explained solely by individual training shortfalls but also by structural conditions: an overloaded teaching function, scarce research funding, and an institutional culture that fails to recognize scientific output as a constitutive part of the faculty role. Serrano et al. (2024) document that gaps in university faculty research competencies are linked to the absence of internal policies for scientific promotion and to weak institutional research cultures. Orama Sánchez and Mena Lorenzo (2022) note that building scientific-research skills among practicing teachers requires differentiated strategies depending on prior skill level and institutional context. Reyes Narváez and Oyola Canto (2024) add that the most deficient dimensions correspond to scientific writing and data analysis, which points to the priority areas for faculty research-training programs. Puche-Villalobos and Acosta-Faneite (2025), in a sample of 150 South American faculty members, identify low institutional priority given to these indicators in several countries, along with variation in tutors' academic preparation, results that underscore the influence of institutional and training conditions on the development of research competencies.

The analyzed evidence supports four interpretive relationships. The first suggests that research self-efficacy may act as a mediating variable between research training and pedagogical innovation. The second proposes that formative research constitutes a pedagogical mechanism that fosters didactic transformation when explicitly aligned with curricular planning. The third indicates that continuing education achieves greater impact when it responds to the institution's actual curricular demands, rather than functioning as training disconnected from teaching practice. The fourth points out that structural factors, including teaching load, institutional research culture, and incentive policies for scientific output, condition the transfer of research competencies into the classroom.

Conclusions

The evidence gathered in this systematic review points to a consistent association between university faculty research skills and pedagogical innovation, although that relationship does not operate directly or automatically. The 21 studies analyzed under the PRISMA 2020 protocol suggest that this association may be mediated by faculty research self-efficacy and conditioned by the institutional circumstances in which faculty carry out their work. This finding shifts the problem from a purely individual plane to an organizational one: strengthening pedagogical innovation at Latin American higher education institutions depends not only on faculty training but also on the structural conditions that allow that training to translate into actual practice.

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The results suggest that research self-efficacy may function as one of the central mediating mechanisms in the relationship under study. Faculty who perceive themselves as more proficient in systematic inquiry procedures tend to show greater willingness to critically examine their own practice, experiment with pedagogical alternatives, and make evidence-based teaching decisions. Faculty training programs should therefore move beyond a model centered exclusively on transmitting methodological content and instead offer applied research experiences tied to authentic classroom problems, supported by sustained technical feedback. When instructors adopt research as a genuine tool of their own work, research training can foster authentic processes of pedagogical innovation.

Accordingly, it is recommended that Latin American higher education institutions orient their faculty professional-development policies around three lines of action. First, design faculty learning communities aligned with curricular planning, with guaranteed continuity and resources, so that formative research stops operating as an isolated activity and becomes a practice integrated into day-to-day pedagogical work. Second, create structural conditions that facilitate faculty research practice: reducing excessive teaching loads, protecting time for research, providing access to specialized academic databases, and offering institutional incentives that recognize scientific output as a legitimate and valued faculty function. Third, strengthen postgraduate programs with an explicit research component tied to actual teaching practice, given that the evidence assembled here identifies faculty training trajectories as a relevant condition for pedagogical innovation in the classroom.

This study acknowledges as a limitation the number of studies incorporated into the synthesis (n = 21) which, while meeting the accepted minimum for systematic reviews, leaves open the possibility of expanding the corpus in future research by including additional databases such as Web of Science, ERIC, or Dialnet. Empirical studies with longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs are also needed to establish causal relationships between faculty research skills and pedagogical innovation, and to determine whether the explanatory mechanisms documented in the international literature operate differently across university contexts marked by high faculty heterogeneity. Taking up that task is the necessary next step for the findings of this review to translate into regional education policy grounded in verified empirical evidence.

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