

TEACHER SHORTAGE IN LATIN AMERICA: SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS OF REJECTION

APAGÃO DE PROFESSORES NA AMÉRICA LATINA: FATORES SOCIOLÓGICOS DA REJEIÇÃO

ESCASEZ DE DOCENTES EN AMÉRICA LATINA: FACTORES SOCIOLÓGICOS DEL RECHAZO



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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes factors contributing to the rejection of teaching careers among high school students in the Adventist Network in Latin America. A mixed-methods survey of 987 students from eight countries, grounded in Bauman's theory of liquid modernity, was used, revealing a preference for bachelor's degrees (67.3%) over teaching degrees (6.7%). The main factor influencing the choice was personal fulfillment and interest in the field (53.3%), followed by salary and financial stability (28.1%). Regarding external influence, 56.4% decide autonomously, while 21.2% cite their parents. The conclusion is that the incompatibility between contemporary aspirations and the traditional teaching career is a determining factor in the crisis of attractiveness, requiring policies to redefine the profession.

KEYWORDS: Teaching career. Social change and education. Career choice. Adventist Education Network.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa fatores da rejeição à carreira docente entre jovens do ensino médio da Rede Adventista na América Latina. Utilizou-se pesquisa mista com survey aplicado a 987 estudantes de oito países, fundamentada na teoria da modernidade líquida de Bauman, e revela preferência por bacharelados (67,3%) sobre licenciaturas (6,7%). O principal fator de escolha foi realização pessoal e interesse pela área (53,3%), seguido por salário e estabilidade financeira (28,1%). Quanto à influência externa, 56,4% decidem autonomamente, enquanto 21,2% citam os pais. Conclui-se que a incompatibilidade entre aspirações contemporâneas e a carreira docente tradicional é determinante na crise de atratividade, exigindo políticas de ressignificação da profissão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Carreira do magistério. Mudança social e educação. Escolha profissional. Rede Adventista de Ensino.

RESUMEN: Este estudio analiza los factores que contribuyen al rechazo de la carrera docente entre estudiantes de secundaria de la Red Adventista en América Latina. Se utilizó una encuesta de métodos mixtos con 987 estudiantes de ocho países, basada en la teoría de la modernidad líquida de Bauman, la cual reveló una preferencia por las carreras de grado (67,3%) sobre los profesados (6,7%). El principal factor que influyó en la elección fue la realización personal y el interés por la profesión (53,3%), seguido del salario y la estabilidad financiera (28,1%). En cuanto a la influencia externa, el 56,4% decide de forma autónoma, mientras que el 21,2% cita a sus padres. La conclusión es que la incompatibilidad entre las aspiraciones contemporáneas y la carrera docente tradicional es un factor determinante en la crisis de atractivo de la profesión, lo que exige políticas para redefinirla.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Carrera docente. Cambio social y educación. Elección de carrera. Red de Educación Adventista.

INTRODUCTION

The established literature links the attractiveness of a teaching career to improvements in salary and working conditions (Gatti & Barreto, 2009; Masson, 2017). However, this predominantly economic approach neglects sociological, cultural, and identity-related dimensions that are essential to contemporary career choices. By focusing on socioeconomic status, studies rarely explore intersections with identity and perceptions of the future—a critical gap in light of the transformations of postmodernity, particularly the theory of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001).

In light of this, the study asks: How does the profile of the individual in liquid society (Bauman, 2001) explain the lack of appeal of teaching among young Latin American high school students? The central objective is to analyze the intersections between the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that determine this rejection, linking empirical data to Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) theory. To this end, the study is based on four hypotheses: H1 – Symbolic Hierarchy: this rejection is based less on salary issues and more on the perception of teaching as incompatible with contemporary aspirations for fluidity and adaptability. H2 – Identity Mediation: the influence of socioeconomic factors on the career's attractiveness is mediated by identity variables inherent to life projects in liquid modernity. H3 – Value Paradox: young people cognitively recognize the social importance of the profession but emotionally reject it due to dissonance with their identity aspirations. H4 – Erosion of Authority: The loss of pedagogical authority in liquid modernity reduces teachers' ability to influence students' career choices, thereby inhibiting the reproduction of the teaching profession.

This research problem and its hypotheses have been linked to the teacher shortage in Latin America, which stems from economic, political, and institutional factors (Almeida et al., 2019). Low pay and poor working conditions make it difficult to retain professionals, while holding multiple jobs overburdens teachers and undermines teaching. Although financial incentives are helpful, public recruitment policies are hampered by discontinuity and structural fragmentation. Furthermore, even though continuing education is essential for career retention (Almeida et al., 2019), the mismatch between pedagogical training and the complexity of the school environment has led to burnout and a sense of professional devaluation.

The distribution of the teaching workforce is severely affected by teacher migration (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). In the Brazilian context, the movement of teachers from rural areas to urban centers (Grinshtain, 2022) exacerbates regional inequalities (Fusco et al., 2023). This trend, characterized by transfers to schools with students possessing greater sociocultural

capital, exacerbates shortages in vulnerable areas (Alves et al., 2015). Consequently, socioeconomically disadvantaged regions experience a shortage of teachers and a lower average quality of the teaching staff (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023), fueling a cycle of educational disadvantage linked to demotivation and a lack of prospects for development.

PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA

The discussion of public education policies in this section is based on a central analytical premise: the attractiveness of the teaching profession cannot be understood merely as a linear response to salary, formal career paths, or regulatory frameworks, but rather as the result of the interaction between material conditions, symbolic recognition, and opportunities for subjective identification with the profession. In this vein, the selection of policies examined here follows a comparative approach guided by two criteria. The first is institutional; that is, it prioritizes programs, plans, or regulatory frameworks explicitly focused on teaching, teacher training, or professional recognition. The second is sociological, as it seeks to observe to what extent such state initiatives focus solely on the material aspects of the career or also address the mechanisms of career rejection—understood here as a lack of vocational interest in pursuing teaching—and the perception of devaluation, understood as the psychosocial perception of low prestige, fragile recognition, and a loss of public legitimacy for the profession. The distinction between these two dimensions is crucial, because a policy can improve administrative parameters without necessarily altering the social perception that deters young people from entering the teaching profession.

Before proceeding with the comparative analysis, it is important to clarify the empirical framework underpinning this section. The study is based on a final sample of $N = 987$ high school seniors from the Adventist school system in eight South American countries, obtained through an online survey administered between September 16 and 30, 2025. The demographic composition showed a slight predominance of females (52.2%) and an age distribution concentrated among 17-year-olds (65.1%) and 18-year-olds (20.5%). Regarding the distribution by country, the sample included participants from Bolivia (28.7%), Ecuador (18.4%), Brazil (18.3%), Chile (11.4%), Peru (8.9%), Paraguay (5.7%), Argentina (4.6%), and Uruguay (4.1%). These data are relevant because they define the analytical scope of the comparisons: this section does not aim to measure, in a national statistical sense, the effectiveness of each public policy, but rather to interpret how different state arrangements

interact with patterns of teacher attractiveness observed in a multinational sample of young people from the same institutional context.

In terms of sources, the comparison employs a deliberately asymmetrical triangulation. For Brazil, the analysis of government action is based primarily on documents from the Ministry of Education (Brasil, 2025) and on federal regulations directly related to the recognition and recruitment of teachers (Ministério da Educação, 2025). For the other countries, the analysis draws on, whenever available, comparable indicators and summaries from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2024), linking them to national ministerial documents to capture the specific nature of the policy under analysis. This approach enhances comparative clarity but imposes limitations that must be acknowledged. First, national systems have distinct institutional architectures, which prevents perfect equivalence between programs. Second, not all countries have the same degree of coverage in international databases, which is why the triangulation between OECD data and national documents should be interpreted as an interpretive comparison rather than a strictly homogeneous measure of government performance. In other words, this section compares policy guidelines and their potential sociological effects on the attractiveness of the career path, without assuming full comparability among all the data sources used.

In light of this context, the Brazilian case is particularly illuminating. The *Mais Professores para o Brasil* [More Teachers for Brazil] program seeks to combine financial incentives, institutional support, and public recognition of the teaching profession (Ministério da Educação, 2025), while recent federal regulations signal a government-led effort to address the teacher shortage (Brasil, 2025). Nevertheless, the manuscript reports a 31.6% career rejection rate among Brazilian respondents—an indicator of vocational disinterest that should not be confused with a mere negative assessment of the profession's social status. Sociologically, this suggests that government action, while relevant, continues to operate more at the level of career supply than at the level of its subjective desirability. In contexts marked by the individualization of career paths, the pursuit of flexibility, and the centrality of self-actualization, recruitment policies tend to lose effectiveness when they fail to reestablish teaching as a plausible identity horizon.

In Chile, on the other hand, the combination of the *Plan Nacional Docente* [National Teaching Plan] and Law 21.625 points to a strategy more strongly linked to professional development and the social recognition of teachers (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2024). In this case, the most consistent data cited is not a direct indicator of career rejection among

Chilean respondents, but rather a contextual fact: only 17% of teachers report feeling valued, according to the OECD (2024). Therefore, the relevant concept here is the perception of devaluation, rather than career rejection in the strict sense. The fact that Chile accounts for 11.4% of the sample reinforces the need for interpretive caution: the Chilean subsample allows us to situate the country within the comparative framework, but does not justify automatically converting sample composition into a measure of vocational orientation. Nevertheless, the low perceived value sheds light on a sociologically relevant point: when a profession is recognized as functional to the educational system but remains symbolically weakened, the career tends to be institutionally stable and, at the same time, culturally unappealing to new generations.

In Argentina, the 2023–2024 Plan Nacional de Evaluación Educativa [National Educational Assessment Plan] is set against a backdrop of heightened political and institutional tension and recurring shifts in public priorities (Gobierno de Argentina, 2023). In this context, the discontinuity of government action does not merely produce administrative inefficiency; it erodes career predictability and weakens young people's confidence in occupations that are heavily dependent on public coordination. For this reason, the most appropriate analytical category for the Argentine case is, once again, that of a perceived devaluation, rather than a simplistic rejection of the teaching profession. Although the Argentine subsample is small (4.6%), the country is a relevant case for analysis because it demonstrates that the attractiveness of teaching also depends on the symbolic stability of institutions: when the state does not present itself as a consistent guarantor of the career, teaching comes to be perceived as a choice with high costs and low predictability.

In Peru, the emphasis on performance-based salary incentives and teacher evaluation policies (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2024) reveals another pattern of government intervention. The most important sociological point, however, is that improved material incentives do not, in and of themselves, reverse a lack of vocational interest. In contexts where professional recognition remains fragile and the career is perceived as demanding and limited in terms of autonomy, economic rewards tend to function as a necessary but not sufficient condition. Thus, when the manuscript links the Peruvian case to career rejection, the argument gains consistency only if one acknowledges that young people's refusal stems from a combination of insufficient incentives, low symbolic attractiveness, and difficulties in identifying with the teaching profession. The fact that Peru accounts for 8.9% of the sample indicates that the country is a significant part of the comparative framework, even if it does not allow for definitive national conclusions.

Ecuador, for its part, is committed to policies focused on Intercultural Bilingual Education, with support and guidance from multilateral organizations (UNESCO, 2024). This is an important agenda from the perspective of inclusion, linguistic diversity, and territorial recognition; however, it does not directly address the social mechanisms that lead to career rejection among young high school graduates. Therefore, in the Ecuadorian case, the main analytical contribution of the observed policy lies less in attracting new candidates to the teaching profession and more in demonstrating that sector-specific educational policies can be robust without directly addressing the issue of the teaching profession's attractiveness. Given that Ecuador accounts for 18.4% of the sample, the case suggests that curricular inclusion and occupational valorization, while related, are not equivalent dimensions of educational policy.

Bolivia, which accounts for 28.7% of the participants and constitutes the largest national contingent in the sample, occupies a strategic position in this comparison. Precisely because of its empirical weight, the country demonstrates how the absence of broadly identifiable initiatives to attract people to the teaching profession limits the state's ability to compete, on a symbolic level, with young people's preference for other career paths. In this case, rather than merely noting a programmatic absence, the sociological analysis points to a void in institutional mediation: when there is no sufficiently visible public policy to reposition teaching as a career with a future, occupational decisions tend to be influenced by factors external to the field of education, such as social mobility, comparative status, and the promise of professional flexibility.

In Paraguay and Uruguay, whose subsamples correspond to 5.7% and 4.1%, respectively, the problem is similar, albeit on a smaller empirical scale. In both cases, the lack of recent policies clearly aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of teaching suggests that the teaching profession remains subject to a kind of institutional inertia: its systemic importance is recognized, but there is insufficient public intervention to make it a desirable career choice for young people. Consequently, the absence of state mechanisms for symbolic revaluation reinforces a pattern already identified throughout the rest of the region: the profession retains normative legitimacy but loses cultural competitiveness in the face of occupations perceived as more prestigious, dynamic, or compatible with contemporary values.

Taken together, the eight cases show that the fragmentation of Latin American public policies stems not only from differences in administrative capacity but also from differing conceptions of the public problem itself. In some countries, the focus is on compensation, career paths, and regulation; in others, on evaluation, inclusion, or training; in very few, however, does

policy explicitly address the disconnect between the abstract social value of teaching and its low practical appeal to young people. Thus, the main comparative finding of this section is that the regional crisis is not limited to a shortage of incentives but involves a contest over the social meaning of the profession. Consequently, regional cooperation takes on strategic importance, whether through academic exchange and training initiatives within Mercosur or through seminars and shared agendas for the valorization of the teaching profession (CAPES, 2024). In summary, effective policies to address the teacher shortage will need to simultaneously address material improvements, institutional stability, and the symbolic reconstruction of teaching as a socially legitimate and biographically desirable career.

CURRENT OVERVIEW: STRUCTURAL INDICATORS

Despite progress toward a National Professional Minimum Wage of R\$ 4,867.77 (Brasil, 2025), the teaching profession faces severe structural challenges in the country. Job insecurity and burnout are reflected in the fact that 51.6% of teaching positions at the state level are temporary (Todos Pela Educação, 2024) and that 79.4% of teachers have considered leaving the profession (Agência Brasil, 2024). Consequently, low social recognition (OECD, 2019) limits the profession's appeal to just 18% of young people (Instituto Península, 2021).

The established literature attributes this devaluation to economic and structural factors. Studies such as those by Lüdke and Boing (2004), Gatti and Barreto (2009), and Tartuce et al. (2010) link this lack of interest to low pay and precarious working conditions, a perspective reinforced by Masson (2017) and Souto and Paiva (2016).

Although fundamental, these contributions have an analytical limitation in that they reduce a complex phenomenon to economic determinism. By focusing on these variables, the literature neglects the sociological, cultural, and identity-related dimensions, which are equally or even more decisive in contemporary career choices.

THE UNEXPLORED SOCIOLOGICAL BIAS: BEYOND ECONOMIC DETERMINISM

Recent literature points to an analytical perspective in which the rejection of a teaching career goes beyond financial considerations and is rooted in profound social transformations. Empirical data support this view: although 50% of young Brazilians have considered teaching, only 5% decide to pursue it (Instituto Península, 2021). The main reasons include the perception

that the profession is excessively challenging, social devaluation, and disrespect from students. This creates a paradox: young people recognize the positive impact of the profession on people's lives (94%) and on the country (93%), yet they reject it as a personal life path.

The report *O Futuro da Docência* [The Future of Teaching] (Conectando Saberes, 2023) emphasizes that this lack of motivation stems from a lack of prestige, job insecurity, and a lack of opportunities for growth. The fact that 26.6% of educators seek spaces for listening and professional development highlights that the crisis of attractiveness is linked to issues of identity, contrasting with the limited possibilities for self-actualization perceived in the career.

In the theoretical realm, Nóvoa (2017) and Tardif (2014) link this crisis to the identity shifts of postmodernity, characterized by young people's search for flexibility and autonomy, which are incompatible with traditional career models. Furthermore, Dubet (2002) and Charlot (2013) suggest that this rejection reflects broader cultural shifts in the valuation of knowledge and pedagogical authority.

In Brazil, Gonçalves (2024) and Martins and Kohan (2025) analyze these dimensions from the perspective of Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) "liquid modernity." However, these investigations remain predominantly theoretical and still lack systematic empirical validation.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This study adopts a mixed-methods exploratory design to investigate the sociological factors underlying the rejection of a teaching career among young Latin Americans nearing the end of high school. This design is justified by the complexity of the phenomenon, which requires an integrated understanding of both the statistical magnitude of this rejection and the meanings that guide career choices in the context of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001).

Based on a pretest (Silva & Caldas, 2026), the qualitative component analyzes open-ended responses to capture discursive nuances and social representations that cannot be quantified but are essential to understanding the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the quantitative stage, operationalized via a survey, measures attitudes, associations between variables, and comparative trends across the eight participating countries. Methodological integration occurs in the design of the instrument—which combines closed-ended and open-ended questions—and in the analysis, where quantitative data outline the structural landscape of rejection, while qualitative data reveal its causal mechanisms and processes of meaning.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The selection of the Adventist school system in eight Latin American countries is based on operational, methodological, and theoretical criteria, going beyond mere convenience. Operationally, one of the authors' affiliation with the Adventist University Center of São Paulo (UNASP) enabled standardized and simultaneous data collection across diverse geographic contexts, overcoming the logistical barriers of a multicenter study.

Methodologically, the network's standardized curriculum and administration serve to control for confounding variables. By minimizing institutional heterogeneity, the study design allows the dynamics of liquid modernity to emerge as explanatory variables, constituting a critical case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006) aimed at analytical generalization (Yin, 2018). Theoretically, Adventist schools promote values of "solid modernity" (Bauman, 2001), such as vocation and long-term commitment. This establishes a "most likely case" (Eckstein, 1975): the high rejection rate of the teaching profession (only 6.7% interest)—even in an institutional environment favorable to teaching—strengthens the explanatory power of the theory of liquid modernity.

Despite this institutional homogeneity, the network serves a socioeconomically diverse student body (Knight, 2015). This combination isolates the analytical variable without compromising external validity. It is recognized, however, that non-probability sampling limits statistical generalizability, requiring that future studies incorporate probability samples in secular and public contexts.

This study builds upon a Brazilian pilot study (Silva & Caldas, 2026), conducted in 2024, which identified individualization and a lack of recognition as critical factors contributing to the "decline in teacher education programs." Based on these findings, the research was expanded to eight South American countries, focusing on high school graduates because they are at a decisive moment in consolidating their career choices (Bohoslavsky, 1977; Levenfus & Soares, 2010). Convenience sampling was adopted, a strategy appropriate for exploratory studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2018). The inclusion criteria were: (1) enrollment in the 3rd year of high school in the Adventist school system in 2025; (2) appropriate age range (16 to 18 years); (3) voluntary and anonymous participation, waiving the need for a formal Informed Consent Form (ICF), in accordance with Resolution No. 674/2022 (Brasil, 2022); and (4) internet access. To preserve the heterogeneity of the sample, no sociodemographic or academic exclusion criteria were applied.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND STEPS

The data collection instrument was developed specifically for this study, based on the literature on the attractiveness of the teaching profession, career choice, and liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001, 2007; Gatti et al., 2019a, 2019b; Tartuce et al., 2010), as well as the theoretical framework of the hypotheses (H1 through H4). The construction of the questionnaire involved translating the hypotheses into measurable variables, reviewing previously validated instruments (e.g., Tartuce et al., 2010; Louzano et al., 2010), and conducting a pretest with 71 students to ensure clarity.

Titled “Career Choices and Perceptions of the Teaching Profession,” the final questionnaire contains 47 items divided into six sections: (1) Sociodemographic Data, for statistical control; (2) Career Choices, focused on course preferences and decision-making factors, operationalizing H1 and H3; (3) Influences and Expectations, which measure the influence of external factors and future prospects (H2 and H4); (4) Perceptions of the Teaching Career, central to H1 and H3, using a Likert scale; (5) Technology and Education, assessing the digital impact on teaching (H4); and (6) Hypothetical Scenarios, to test the sensitivity of choices to structural changes (H2 and H3).

Originally written in Portuguese, the instrument was translated into Spanish and reviewed by an educational coordinator from the Adventist network in the seven Spanish-speaking countries. This process ensured cultural and terminological equivalence prior to its implementation.

Data collection took place online via Google Forms between September 16 and 30, 2025, a period chosen to minimize temporal biases. Access was facilitated by the network’s general coordination (South American Division – DSA), which forwarded the link to school principals for distribution to 3rd-year students. Participation was strictly anonymous and voluntary. Of the 1,023 initial responses, incomplete or duplicate questionnaires were excluded, resulting in a final sample of $N = 987$ students.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis was performed using Jamovi 2.6.44 software (The Jamovi Project, 2024). Descriptive statistics included absolute and relative frequencies for categorical variables, as well as measures of central tendency and dispersion for continuous variables.

To measure the practical magnitude of the associations and mitigate the limitations of relying solely on p-values (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012), effect sizes were calculated: Cramér's V for contingency tables (Cohen, 1988) and Cohen's d for comparisons of means.

A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted. Cases with missing data on key variables were excluded from specific analyses. Since this attrition rate was less than 5%, the validity of the tests was preserved, and the effective sample size (valid N) is reported individually in the results tables.

RESULTS

Analysis of the data revealed significant differences among participating countries with regard to the representativeness indicator, defined here as the proportion of students from each country within the total sample ($N = 987$). This indicator does not refer to external variables—such as national population size, the number of teachers in the workforce, or government statistics—but exclusively to each country's relative participation in the survey's pool of respondents, reflecting the sampling weight of each national context in the composition of the results.

Thus, the representativeness of the countries should be interpreted as the percentage of young people graduating from Adventist high schools, by country, who made up the surveyed sample. It is, therefore, an indicator internal to the study, which expresses the volume of data obtained in each country and allows for an understanding of the comparative scope of the findings. In practical terms, this means that countries with a larger number of respondents exert greater statistical influence on the identified patterns, while countries with lower participation contribute with less relative weight to the analysis of regional trends.

Based on this criterion, Bolivia had the highest representation (28.7%), followed by Ecuador (18.4%), Brazil (18.3%), and Chile (11.4%). The remaining countries had lower representation: Argentina (4.6%), Paraguay (5.7%), Peru (8.9%), and Uruguay (4.1%). These proportions reflect the actual distribution of students in the surveyed school system who were available and participated in the study during the data collection period, and do not represent any form of statistical balance among countries.

Any interpretation of the results must take this sample composition into account, as the presentation of the data—especially those related to the rejection of a teaching career and the sociocultural perceptions analyzed—derives directly from each country's proportional weight

in the sample. Thus, the concept of representativeness used in this study serves to contextualize the countries' representation in the sample and ensure transparency in the interpretation of the comparative findings (Table 1).

Table 1.

Sociodemographic characteristics

What country do you live in?	n	%
Argentina	46	4.6
Bolivia	284	28.7
Brazil	181	18.3
Chile	113	11.4
Ecuador	182	18.4
Paraguay	56	5.7
Peru	88	8.9
Uruguay	41	4.1
How old are you?		
15 years old	1	0.1
16 years old	123	12.4
17 years old	645	65.1
18 years old	203	20.5
19 years old or older	19	1.9
What is your gender?		
Female	517	52.2
Male	474	47.8

Note. Prepared by the authors using data from the survey.

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents stated their intention to enroll in bachelor's degree programs (67.3%), while 12.4% had not yet decided and 11% opted for technical programs. Only 2.6% stated that they did not intend to pursue higher education. The areas of greatest interest were Biological and Health Sciences (34.5%), followed by Legal and Social Sciences (26.0%) and Engineering and Technology (24.6%), highlighting a preference for fields traditionally associated with social prestige and employability. The main factor cited for choosing a career was personal fulfillment and interest in the field (53.3%), followed by salary and financial stability (28.1%). Regarding external influence, 56.4% stated that they decide for themselves which profession to pursue, while 21.2% cited their parents as the main influencers. As for perceptions of the job market, 41.3% believe there are opportunities for those who are qualified, but 29.3% consider it very competitive. The main concern regarding their professional future was not being able to find a job in their desired field (28.6%), followed by low pay (24.2%) and lack of stability (16.6%).

Table 2.*Aspects that influence the choice of a course*

What kind of college program do you plan to pursue?	n	%
I haven't decided yet	123	12.4
Bachelor's degree (e.g., Medicine, Law, Engineering, Theology)	667	67.3
Teaching degree (e.g., Education, Language and Literature, Mathematics, Biology)	66	6.7
I do not plan to attend college	26	2.6
Technical degree	109	11.0
Which field of study interests you the most?		
Biological and Health Sciences (e.g., Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Biology, Physical Therapy, Psychology)	342	34.5
Humanities (e.g., Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science)	84	8.5
Legal and Social Sciences (e.g., Law, Economics, Business Administration, International Relations)	258	26.0
Education (e.g., Education, Language and Literature, History, Biology, Mathematics, Geography)	63	6.4
Engineering and Technology (e.g., General Engineering, Systems Analysis, Digital Games)	244	24.6
What is the main factor influencing your career choice?		
Good salary and financial stability	278	28.1
How easy it is to find a job	38	3.8
Family influence	40	4.0
Opportunity to start a business	78	7.9
Social prestige of the profession	29	2.9
Personal fulfillment and interest in the field	528	53.3
Who else influences your career decisions?		
Friends	12	1.2
Myself	559	56.4
My parents	210	21.2
Media/Internet/TV shows	56	5.7
No one in particular	113	11.4
Other family members (grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins)	36	3.6
Teachers	5	0.5
How do you view the current job market?		
Favorable only for certain fields (e.g., technology, healthcare)	101	10.2
There are opportunities for those who are qualified	409	41.3
Unstable and uncertain	97	9.8
Very competitive; difficult to find a job	290	29.3
I haven't formed an opinion yet	94	9.5
What concerns you most about your professional future?		
High competition in the job market	63	6.4
Earning little money	240	24.2
Technological changes making my profession obsolete	51	5.1
Not being able to find a job in the field I want	283	28.6
Not finding professional fulfillment	158	15.9
Not being recognized as an individual	31	3.1
Lacking professional stability	165	16.6

Note. Prepared by the authors using data from the survey.

Table 3 shows that the majority of students do not consider a career in teaching (78.8%), with the main reasons being: interest in other fields (31.3%), lack of a calling (19.3%), low salaries (19.0%), and stress/workload (18.4%).

Table 3.*On whether or not to become a teacher*

Have you ever considered becoming a teacher?	n	%
No (this includes having considered it at some point but then giving up on the idea)	781	78.8
Yes (this includes considering it as a second option)	210	21.2
If you do NOT consider becoming a teacher, what is the main reason?		
Difficult working conditions (infrastructure, violence)	28	3.0
Disrespect and discipline problems among students	41	4.4
Stress and excessive workload	172	18.4
Lack of social recognition	43	4.6
I don't have a calling for teaching	180	19.3
Low salaries	177	19.0
I'm interested in other fields	292	31.3

Note. Prepared by the authors using data from the survey.

Regarding social representations and perspectives on teaching (Table 4), the results show that young people recognize the social importance of teaching but perceive it as a career marked by low pay (37.1%), social devaluation (23.3%), and adverse working conditions (violence, poor infrastructure, and excessive bureaucracy). The image of teachers in today's society is predominantly that of someone important yet undervalued (62.0%), although there are negative perceptions, such as "a profession in decline" (9.6%). Despite this, more than half of the participants (54.4%) defined the profession as essential to society and deserving of greater appreciation, revealing a contradiction between symbolic recognition and practical rejection of the career.

Regarding the role of teachers in relation to technology, the majority believe that teachers remain necessary, even though they are partially replaceable by artificial intelligence in some subjects (42.0%). As for inspiration, 60.2% reported that some or several teachers motivate them, but 39.3% stated that they would not pursue the career even with better salaries, indicating that the rejection is not limited to financial considerations. Finally, the view of teaching was largely positive, with 45.2% describing it as a noble and transformative mission, although a significant portion associates it with a lack of patience (26.0%) or a lack of personal affinity (21.0%). These findings reveal a generation of young people who symbolically value teaching but do not consider it an attractive career choice, primarily due to structural conditions and low social recognition.

Table 4.*Social representations and perspectives on teaching*

In your opinion, what is the main problem with a teaching career in your country?	n	%
The social devaluation of the profession	231	23.3
Low pay	368	37.1
Bureaucracy and excessive workload	61	6.2
Lack of government support	133	13.4
Poor school infrastructure	88	8.9
Violence and discipline problems in schools	110	11.1
How do you view teachers in today's society?		
It depends on the teacher	3	0.3
Lack of vocation	5	0.5
Important, but undervalued	614	62.0
I have no opinion	179	18.1
Poorly prepared	5	0.5
A profession in decline and obsolete	95	9.6
An essential profession that is duly valued	88	8.9
Overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated	2	0.2
Do you believe it's possible to learn without a teacher?		
It depends on the subject	85	8.6
Partially, but teachers are still necessary	610	61.6
No, teachers are irreplaceable	192	19.4
Yes, technology can completely replace teachers	104	10.5
Do you think artificial intelligence can replace teachers?		
I'm not sure about that	83	8.4
No, it will never be able to completely replace them	347	35.0
Partially, in some subjects	416	42.0
Yes, completely in the near future	145	14.6
At your school, do teachers inspire you professionally?		
Some teachers inspire me	349	35.2
No teachers inspire me	89	9.0
I've never thought about it	53	5.3
A few teachers inspire me	252	25.4
Yes, several teachers inspire me	248	25.0
If teaching offered better pay, would you consider it as a career?		
I don't know how to answer	30	3.0
No, I still wouldn't be interested	389	39.3
Yes, definitely	186	18.8
Maybe, it would depend on other factors	386	39.0
Which of these statements best represents your view on teaching?		
"Teaching requires a lot of patience, which I don't have"	258	26.0
"Teaching is important, but it's not for me"	208	21.0
"Teaching is a noble and transformative calling"	448	45.2
"Teaching is a profession like any other"	51	5.1
"Teaching is a profession of the past"	26	2.6
Finally, complete the sentence: "The teaching profession is..."		
Essential to society and should be more highly valued	539	54.4
Important, but undervalued and unattractive	276	27.9
A career that can be rewarding despite the difficulties	77	7.8
An option for those who can't find other professions	55	5.5
A profession on the verge of extinction due to technology	44	4.4

Note. Prepared by the authors using data from the survey.

Data analysis revealed that country of origin was significantly associated with consideration of a teaching career ($\chi^2(7) = 44.1$; $p < 0.001$). Participants from Bolivia reported a higher-than-expected frequency of affirmative responses, while those from Brazil and

Uruguay reported a lower frequency of affirmative responses. In Ecuador, a borderline trend toward a lower proportion of affirmative responses was observed. No significant differences were found between men and women ($\chi^2(1) = 0.007$; $p = 0.931$) (Table 5).

Field of study was also associated with willingness to become a teacher ($\chi^2(4) = 122$; $p < 0.001$). Students in the Humanities gave affirmative responses more frequently, while those in the Biological and Health Sciences and in Engineering and Technology gave affirmative responses less frequently. The field of Education stood out with a strong positive association, recording fewer negative responses and more affirmative responses. Furthermore, perceptions regarding teacher inspiration proved to be relevant ($\chi^2(4) = 16$; $p = 0.003$), with a lower frequency of affirmative responses among those who reported not feeling inspired by their teachers. The results suggest that teacher inspiration is a factor associated with a higher likelihood of considering a career in teaching.

Salary considerations were another decisive factor ($\chi^2(2) = 230$; $p < 0.001$): participants who stated that they would not pursue the career even with better pay gave fewer affirmative responses, while those who answered “yes, definitely” gave more positive responses. The analysis of concerns regarding professional future also indicated a significant association ($\chi^2(6) = 14.4$; $p = 0.026$), but no adjusted residual exceeded the critical value of ± 1.96 , suggesting that no single category contributed in a distinct manner. Finally, views on teaching were strongly associated with the willingness to pursue a career in teaching ($\chi^2(4) = 88.2$; $p < 0.001$), with negative perceptions (“it’s not for me,” “I don’t have the patience”) linked to lower interest, and positive perceptions (“a noble and transformative mission”) linked to a greater propensity to consider a career in teaching.

Table 5.

Independent chi-square test and Fisher’s exact test of associations between sociodemographic, academic, and motivational variables and the consideration of a teaching career

	Considered being a teacher		Adjusted residuals*			
	No ^a	Yes ^b	$\chi^2(\text{gl})$	p	No	Yes
Country of origin						
Argentina	31	15	44.1(7)	< 0.001		
Bolivia	194	90			-2.040	3.578
Brazil	162	19				-3.467
Chile	88	25				
Ecuador	155	27				-1.970
Paraguay	45	11				
Peru	68	20				
Uruguay	38	3				-2.235
Gender						
Female	408	109	0.007(1)	0.931		
Male	373	101				

Which field of study interests you the most?						
Biological and Health Sciences (e.g., Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Biology, Physical Therapy, Psychology)	286	56	122(4)	< 0.001		-2.02
Humanities (e.g., Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science)	53	31				2.83
Law and Social Sciences (e.g., Law, Economics, Business Administration, International Relations)	217	41				
Education (e.g., Education, Language and Literature, History, Biology, Mathematics, Geography)	18	45		-5.174		6.79
Engineering and Technology (e.g., General Engineering, Systems Analysis, Digital Games)	207	37				-2.16
What is the main factor influencing your career choice?						
Good salary and financial stability	230	48	6.44(5)	0.266		
Ease of finding a job	29	9				
Family influence	30	10				
Opportunity to start a business	66	12				
Social prestige of the profession	22	7				
Personal fulfillment and interest in the field	404	124				
Who else influences your career decisions?						
Friends	8	4	6.51(6)	0.369		
Myself	447	112				
My parents	167	43				
Media/Internet/TV shows	46	10				
No one in particular	81	32				
Other family members (grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins)	29	7				
Teachers	3	2				
In your opinion, what is the main problem with a teaching career in your country?						
The social devaluation of the profession	185	46	6.65(5)	0.248		
Low pay	297	71				
Bureaucracy and excessive workload	49	12				
Lack of government support	106	27				
Poor school infrastructure	61	27				
Violence and discipline problems in schools	83	27				
Total	781	210				
At your school, do teachers inspire you professionally?						
Some teachers inspire me	267	82	16(4)	0.003		
No teachers inspire me	82	7				-3.137
I've never thought about it	46	7				
A few teachers inspire me	202	50				
Yes, several teachers inspire me	184	64				
If the teaching profession offered better pay, would you consider it?						
No, I still wouldn't be interested	376	13	230(2)	< 0.001	3.957	-9.721
Yes, definitely	76	110			-6.351	8.999
Maybe, it would depend on other factors	300	86				

What concerns you most about your professional future?					
High competition in the job market	55	8	14.4(6)	0.026	
Earning little money	195	45			
Technological changes making my profession obsolete	40	11			
Not being able to find a job in the field I want	208	75			
Not finding professional fulfillment	135	23			
Not being recognized as an individual	25	6			
Lacking professional stability	123	42			
Which of these statements best represents your view on teaching?					
“Teaching requires a lot of patience, which I don’t have”	231	27	88.2(4)	< 0.001	–4.153
“Teaching is important, but it’s not for me”	195	13		2.356	–5.514
“Teaching is a noble and transformative mission”	297	151		–3.068	5.294
“Teaching is a profession like any other”	38	13			
“Teaching is a profession of the past”	20	6			

Note. Prepared by the authors using data from the survey. ^aThis refers to having considered it at some point but then giving up. ^b This refers to considering it as a second option. * Only residuals that differed significantly from critical values of ± 1.96 are reported.

DISCUSSION

Before interpreting the findings, it should be noted that not all the data presented in the tables were analyzed in equal depth in the discussion. This decision stems from a methodological criterion consistent with the exploratory mixed-methods design adopted: for the main interpretation, priority was given to indicators directly linked to the study’s hypotheses, results with the greatest statistical significance, and variables with the greatest theoretical depth to explain the rejection of a teaching career. Thus, although the set of tables constitutes the complete descriptive overview of the research, the discussion focused on the data most pertinent to the article’s analytical framework—particularly those related to the symbolic hierarchy of teaching, the identity-based mediation of professional choices, the value paradox, and the erosion of teaching authority. This approach does not imply disregarding the other results, but rather an analytical selection guided by thematic focus, interpretive coherence, and argumentative economy, thereby preventing an excess of variables from compromising the intelligibility of the central argument.

That said, the results indicate that demographic characteristics do not explain the rejection of teaching, suggesting cross-cutting macrosocial and cultural causes (Bauman, 2012). The homogeneity of the phenomenon reinforces the link between this rejection and broad sociocultural transformations, especially Bateson’s (2000) “third level” of education—the

ability to deconstruct cognitive structures—which is inherent in contemporary “liquid life” and its demand for constant adaptation.

Silva and Caldas (2025) highlight that the teaching crisis in Latin America reflects a complex crisis, “driven by factors such as the devaluation of the teaching profession, with unattractive salaries, precarious working conditions, and the perception of a lack of social prestige” (p. 231). In the digital age, the democratization of knowledge relativizes hierarchies and transforms teaching authority into a negotiable value, generating a crisis of meaning that breaks the vocational cycle. The erosion of this symbolic, intellectual, and moral authority undermines the foundations of the vocation. Furthermore, Silva and Caldas (2025) highlight that the redefinition of teacher education shifts the responsibility for structural failures onto the individual, exposing tensions between market logic and the educational mission. At the same time, the legitimization of knowledge through algorithms displaces the teacher from their central position, forcing them to compete with non-pedagogical sources.

According to Tardif (2014), teachers’ knowledge is socially constructed and requires collective recognition. Restoring the appeal of the teaching profession demands pedagogical authority focused on critical guidance rather than informational control, recognizing teachers as essential shapers of citizens. Similarly, Nóvoa (1992) warns that teacher education should not be reduced to market-oriented training but should instead constitute a process of development that enables autonomous and creative practice—attributes threatened by the questioning of teachers’ authority.

The study reveals a value-based paradox: young people recognize the social importance of teaching but rule it out as a life path because it does not align with contemporary identity aspirations. This validates Hypothesis 1 (Symbolic Hierarchization), as the main reason for rejection is not “low salaries” (19.0%) but “interest in other fields” (31.3%). This vocational shift aligns with liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001, 2007). In a society that values fluidity and adaptability, the stability and institutional rigidity of the teaching career are perceived as anachronistic. The areas of greatest interest reflect the search for dynamic and flexible trajectories, typical of the “liquid subject.”

The sensitivity analysis of appreciation policies supports Hypothesis 2 (Identity Mediation). Although “better wages” is the main factor driving reconsideration (37.1%), the combined demand for “greater recognition and social prestige” (23.3%) and “better working conditions” (20%) demonstrates that the material dimension is insufficient. Crucially, 39.3% state that “nothing would make them change their minds,” indicating an existential and identity-

based rejection that is immune to economic incentives. Thus, the socioeconomic influence on attractiveness is mediated by identity-related variables. Job insecurity, exemplified by the increase in temporary contracts (Todos Pela Educação, 2024), exacerbates the situation by stripping the teaching career of its historical security and subjecting it to unwanted instability.

Regarding Hypothesis 3 (Value Paradox), the majority define teaching as essential (54.4%), and 62% consider teachers important but undervalued. Furthermore, 45.2% associate teaching with a noble mission. These data confirm that the rejection does not stem from a lack of awareness of the career's social function, which remains symbolically legitimized. However, this cognitive appreciation does not translate into occupational commitment. Teaching is morally recognized but emotionally rejected as a life project, empirically confirming the dissociation between the collective importance of the profession and its desirability as a source of identity.

Hypothesis 4 (Erosion of Authority) finds strong empirical support. In the epistemic dimension, 52.5% of students believe that artificial intelligence can partially or completely replace teachers, calling into question their monopoly on knowledge in the information society (Castells, 2015; Siemens, 2005). In terms of vocational authority, 34.4% report little or no inspiration from their teachers, highlighting a breakdown in the vocational cycle (Nóvoa, 2017; Tardif, 2014). Statistically, the lack of inspiration significantly reduced the intention to pursue a career in teaching ($\chi^2(4) = 16$; $p = 0.003$; adjusted residual = -3.137). On a symbolic level, the perception of teachers as “obsolete” (9.6%), social devaluation (23.3%), and indiscipline/violence (11.1%) attest to the erosion of the profession's legitimacy and moral authority in liquid modernity (Charlot, 2013; Dubet, 2002). Together, these structural factors reduce the attractiveness of the career, thereby validating H4.

With the decentralization of knowledge in the digital age and access via platforms and artificial intelligence, the relationship between education and information is being redefined (Castells, 2015; Lévy, 2010). The digital native generation challenges traditional epistemic authority (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009). The reason cited as “interest in other fields” (31.3%), which outweighs complaints about salary (19%), indicates that the profession has lost its intellectual relevance in a society that treats knowledge as an accessible commodity (Bauman, 2007; Han, 2017). The illusion of the democratization of knowledge devalues the educator's mediating role. Consequently, the loss of symbolic status breaks the chain of vocational transmission that ensured the renewal of the profession (Nóvoa, 2017; Tardif, 2014), as reflected in the fact that only 6.7% of young people consider teaching as an option.

The erosion of teachers' authority manifests itself in three dimensions: epistemic, challenged by the instant availability of information (Siemens, 2005); moral, challenged by the diversification of digital influences (Jenkins et al., 2016); and institutional, weakened by the devaluation of institutions in liquid society (Bauman, 2001). Young people's instrumental relationship with knowledge—mediated by search engines and generative artificial intelligence—contradicts the foundations of formal education (Carr, 2011; Turkle, 2017), diminishing the teacher's role as a critical facilitator. Digital culture, which prioritizes speed over reflection (Rosa, 2019; Virilio, 2012), fuels a vicious cycle of devaluation that inhibits vocational aspirations. Therefore, restoring the attractiveness of the teaching profession requires not only material improvements but also a redefinition of the teacher's role. Contemporary authority must focus on the development of critical thinking and socio-emotional skills that cannot be replaced by technology (Fullan & Scott, 2014; Zhao, 2012). This transformation goes beyond curricular adaptations, requiring a response to the profound erosion of the symbolic authority that has historically sustained the teacher as a privileged mediator of knowledge.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study demonstrates that the rejection of a teaching career among young Latin Americans transcends socioeconomic factors. The empirical validation of Bauman's (2001) theory of liquid modernity reveals that the symbolic incompatibility between the "solidity" of traditional teaching and the contemporary pursuit of "liquidity" and flexibility is the main determinant of this crisis of attractiveness.

The integration of the findings outlines a clear sociological diagnosis. Hypothesis 1 (Symbolic Hierarchization) confirmed that the rejection stems primarily from an identity-based incompatibility, with 31.3% of young people preferring "other fields," compared to 19.0% who cited low salaries. Hypothesis 2 (Identity Mediation) highlighted the inadequacy of purely economic policies, given that 39.3% would not pursue the career even with better pay. Hypothesis 3 (Value Paradox) exposed the contradiction in which 54.4% recognize teaching as essential but reject it as a life project, dissociating its collective value from its personal appeal. Finally, Hypothesis 4 (Erosion of Authority) pointed to the loss of epistemic, vocational, and symbolic authority in the digital age: 34.4% report little or no inspiration from their teachers, and 52.5% view the role as replaceable by artificial intelligence, disrupting the cycle of

generational renewal. In short, the crisis of attractiveness is essentially symbolic and identity-based and should inform the formulation of public policies.

Consequently, strategies for enhancing the status of the teaching profession in Latin America—and in Brazil in particular—must go beyond the issue of salary and incorporate a symbolic redefinition of the profession. Redesigning the teaching career requires aligning it with young people's aspirations for autonomy and innovation, through more flexible work schedules, an end to multiple jobs, and the strengthening of intellectual authority in the classroom. Although initiatives such as *Mais Professores* (Brazil) and the *Plan Nacional Docente* (Chile) represent progress by combining economic incentives with professional revaluation, they lack a stronger focus on professional identity. Public policies must therefore prioritize: (1) the symbolic redefinition of the teacher's role in the digital society; (2) greater career flexibility to allow for more autonomy; (3) technological integration that positions teachers as critical mediators; (4) the enhancement of social prestige; and (5) the political continuity of these strategies. Success in attracting talent depends on addressing the incompatibility between young people's aspirations for financial flexibility and the traditional "stable" model of teaching.

The study has limitations that should be taken into account. The non-probability sampling within a specific religious school network limits statistical generalizability, calling for future research using probability samples in public and private secular schools. The absence of this secular control group limits the full validation of the "critical case" (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and "most likely case" (Eckstein, 1975) arguments. Furthermore, Hypothesis 4 lacked a dedicated tabular presentation, requiring direct testing with specific instruments in subsequent studies. The short data collection period (15 days) at the end of the school year may have introduced seasonal effects linked to the pressure of college entrance exams. Longitudinal studies and more representative samples are recommended to track the evolution of these perceptions.

Despite these limitations, the study believes it has empirically validated Bauman's (2001) theory to explain the crisis in the attractiveness of the teaching profession from a sociological perspective. The "teacher shortage" reflects profound social transformations. Understanding these dynamics is the first step toward ensuring that new public policies can truly rekindle interest in the profession and restore the value of mutual exchange and learning between students and teachers in times of uncertainty.

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