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University and challenge of citizenship education. Professors' conceptions in training

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Society and, therefore, the university, as a public space, face the challenge of training a critical citizenry capable of confronting existing problems. The work we present here highlights the role played by university professors in this issue. By means of a multiple case study we delve into the conceptions of nine university teachers in training on their conceptions of citizenship, citizenship education and university. The approach to their conceptions allows us to establish a framework of interpretation that reflects different levels of progression in their conceptions, from simple to complex. The least elaborated conceptions correspond to a vision of citizenship of a legal nature, without explicit proposals on how to educate for citizenship and under a conception of a university whose purpose is to transmit contents. Those corresponding to more complex levels refer to a perception of citizenship of a democratic and transformative nature, where the key to educating citizenship is the introduction of controversial issues, under a conception of a university that is critical and connected to social reality. Between both extremes there are intermediate levels, as well as obstacles and facilitators that favor or impede the development of more complex conceptions. Their analysis is key to incorporating appropriate training strategies. The improvement of continuous teacher training in this area will have a direct impact on students' citizenship skills.

KEYWORDS

university professor training, citizenship, citizenship education, university, obstacles, facilitators

Introduction

The role of higher education is to enable young people and others to be able to imagine and bring into being alternative democratic futures and horizons of possibility (Apple et al., 2022, p. 12).

Today's education faces the challenge of training a more critical and committed citizenry to face the social, political, and economic challenges (Ross, 2018). Although the approaches dictated by world reports and the curricula themselves consider it within their purposes, this does not cease to be a complex area to address within a global context characterized by diversity and multiple problems (Council of Europe, 2016).

In this sense, the consolidation of a common framework for citizenship education that favors the construction of a society that is more critical and committed to reality is still under constant debate (Myers, 2016; Andreotti, 2021). In the university context, with the reforms raised by the Bologna Plan, the need to go beyond training higher education students in technical and professional competencies was incorporated, including social and citizenship competence (European Commission et al., 2018). However, recent research points to the fact that young people have few skills, values, and attitudes to interpret reality and participate about it critically and oriented toward social justice (González-Valencia et al., 2020; Castellví et al., 2021). In addition, the very curricula and training of university faculty neglect the relevance of citizenship education, which makes its incorporation isolated and anecdotal (Mellen et al., 2017; Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2021a).

In the present study we intend to explore professors' conceptions about citizenship, citizenship education and university. On the one hand, characterizing these conceptions allows us to understand the perceptions of university professors. On the other hand, it helps us to know the existing obstacles and facilitators to incorporate this issue in the Spanish context. Ultimately, this research favors reflection on which are the most desirable models for incorporating citizenship education in the university from a democratic and critical approach.

What citizenship, what citizenship education, what university?

The concept of citizenship has traditionally been related to the creation of nation states and the political rights resulting from one's nationality (Papadiamantaki, 2014). This conception of citizenship, of a legal nature, has perpetuated that the teaching of citizenship has been linked to discourses of a nationalistic nature that promote patriotic values (Grever and Van Der Vlies, 2017). The reality of an increasingly interconnected and diverse

world makes this conception obsolete, as the problems we face are common, regardless of our origin. Hence, in recent years the debate on the formation of a global citizenship has become more relevant (Estelles and Fischman, 2020; Andreotti, 2021).

Westheimer (2019) posits three models of "good" citizenship: personally responsible citizen; participatory citizen; and social justice-oriented citizen. The personally responsible citizen acts in an engaged way in the community. The participatory citizen is an active member of organizations, cares for the community and even promotes economic development. On the other hand, the social justice-oriented citizen not only participates in the community, but also criticizes the social, political, and economic structures, exploring strategies to change the problems, questioning the existing reality. As indicated by Myers (2016) and Westheimer (2019) the lack of agreement on the models to be developed makes that in practice a model focused on developing good character and promoting patriotic attitudes is promoted, making invisible models that value the development of critical thinking and democratic attitudes. This issue is currently relevant due to the increase in populist discourses and the difficulty young people have in managing and interpreting biased information (Castellví et al., 2021). In the study developed by Navarro-Medina and de-Alba-Fernández (2019) with first-year undergraduate students, it is shown that they have a model of citizenship characterized by political passivity, derived from insufficient political training and a conception of democracy as an acquired right. This has a serious consequence, since young people do not have the skills to propose changes in the socioeconomic model.

The above reality makes us rethink the need to reinforce the very practice of education for citizenship. Although it is true that, as mentioned above, it is a diffuse, complex, and constantly redefining field, in recent years there has been a commitment to consider the implications of citizenship education in a global context. The study developed by Pashby et al. (2020) suggests the existence of a broad typology of global citizenship education, aligned with neoliberal, liberal and critical approaches. In this sense, the authors advocate a post-critical model that changes the *status quo* (Andreotti, 2006) and transforms reality (Shultz, 2007). According to Pashby et al. (2020) the transformations proposed to date have perpetuated the current model from a modernist and colonialist perspective, which is far from being oriented toward social justice. Pais and Costa (2020) make a similar ideological critique. From their perspective, while the critical democratic discourse privileges the importance of ethical values, social responsibility, and active citizenship, the neoliberal one focuses on market rationality, self-investment, and profit enhancement. The ideological implications on the very development of citizenship education in the classroom are key. According to Sant (2021) to bring about changes to achieve social justice-oriented citizenship education, it is necessary that in addition to considering critical and counter-hegemonic pedagogies, which place the focus on critical literacy

and activism, radical and open pedagogies, which include disagreement between the different groups involved and their personal experiences, are also considered. The objective is that students, in addition to proposing actions to transform existing problems, can engage with them from their own reality. Teachers play a relevant role since “they do not come to the classroom with the intention of facilitating ‘their’ own democracy but with the intention of facilitating that their students can build their own democratic projects” (Sant, 2021, p. 146).

In this sense, initiatives and experiences that consider work around relevant social problems or controversial issues (Legardez, 2017; Santisteban, 2019) and in which activities that introduce strategies such as case studies, moral dilemmas, role-playing games, or small and large group debates predominate (Boni et al., 2012) are shown to be effective in the citizenship training of young people (Boni et al., 2016; Boni and Calabuig, 2017). In the study developed by Boni et al. (2016), it is evident how students progressively begin to reflect with greater complexity in their arguments, considering the multiple factors that affect a problem. However, although they assume their share of responsibility for the problems worked on, they have difficulties in empathizing with the protagonists involved. In the study developed by Wood et al. (2018) with New Zealand teachers when implementing a curricular initiative focused on developing active citizenship, it is obtained as a result that citizenship learning must be done through affective and cognitive domains. To achieve democratic engagement, it is necessary, on the one hand, for students to become emotionally attached to social problems and, on the other hand, for them to be able to develop a critical and deliberative understanding of them. The results of this research show how the projects developed by the students do not reach a critical and transformative level. According to the authors, this could be due to a lack of affective engagement of the students with their own environment and the problems existing in it. On the contrary, the study developed by Astaíza-Martínez et al. (2019) shows how working around projects that are based on the identification and transformation of problems of the immediate context, in which students actively participate, favors both in them and in the teaching staff a change in the conception of citizenship, from a merely legal level, before participating in the project, to a transformative vision after participating in it. Therefore, participation in the project influences the change of conceptions about their role as citizens.

Despite the experiences implemented, still today teachers do not feel prepared to work on controversial issues in the classroom (Pace, 2019). In the study developed by Kitson and McCully (2005) in which they characterize history teachers in England and the north of Ireland in relation to the teaching of controversial issues, they establish a characterization in 3 types of teachers: avoider, in reference to those who avoid dealing with these issues in the classroom; container, in relation

to those who, although they work on controversial issues, do so in connection with specific historical processes; and risk-taker, linked to teachers who take advantage of any opportunity to work on controversial issues. In a similar study developed by Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès (2022) with secondary school teachers, the main result is that, although teachers emphasize the relevance of teaching and learning deliberative skills through controversial issues, they show resistance to implement this type of strategies in classroom practice. The study by Cotton (2006) shows that university teachers are resistant to including some controversial issues, such as sustainable development, arguing the lack of relevance to the discipline or the lack of connection with the content to be worked on. Therefore, and as McCowan (2014) points out, the professors’ own commitment, attitudes, and positioning with respect to controversial issues influence their inclusion in the classroom. Another difficulty encountered by teachers is the selection of controversial issues at a time of political polarization (McAvoy and Hess, 2013). The authors consider that to develop democratic and deliberative attitudes in students, ideological debates that go beyond closed questions must take place. From this defense, they make a classification of controversial questions, depending on whether they can be answered with empirical evidence or whether they refer to political issues. For the authors, an open empirical question is one that can be debated because it is a scientific problem for which there is not yet sufficient evidence, for example: “does food irradiation cause public health problems?” However, an open policy question is one for which there may be multiple answers and political positions, for example, “should the United States continue sanctions against Iran?”

Beyond the teaching practice of the faculty, the current responsibility of the university itself with the citizenship education of students is unquestionable (Hammond and Keating, 2018; Escámez-Sánchez and Peris-Cancio, 2021). The university has been losing its role as a democratic public sphere to place itself since the crisis of the 1970s at the service of a neoliberal market focused on the maximization of economic resources (Giroux, 2015). This type of university is more aligned with a vision of education based on the development of competencies (Schattle, 2008), at the service of business (Stein, 2015) and economic profits (Marshall, 2011; Andreotti, 2014). According to Escámez-Sánchez and Peris-Cancio (2021) the priority mission of universities cannot be economic growth as an end, as it has serious consequences for our own social sustainability. As stated by Apple et al. (2022) the substitution of academic values by corporate values makes the university move in an irrational logic whereby training young people to address social injustices or constituting a critical mass of teachers as public intellectuals at the service of social needs disappears. Consequently, the predominant pattern of social relationship within and outside the institution itself is characterized by competitiveness and individualism (Giroux, 2015). In this context, the concept of university social

responsibility arises as a necessity in university policy and management, with the aim of consolidating a more sustainable, cooperative, and democratic university model (Larrán-Jorge and Andrades-Peña, 2017; Martínez-Usarralde et al., 2017). Therefore, it is urgent to move toward an university model that goes beyond training good professionals (Mellen et al., 2017; Walker and Fongwa, 2017) and can change the internal dynamics to build a democratic space where the social problems we face are debated and where the generation of knowledge, values and attitudes are aimed at improving reality.

Materials and methods

Participants, context, and research problems

The research developed is based on a qualitative multiple case study (Yin, 2014). This type of study allows us to understand a reality shared by a set of cases, safeguarding the particularities of each teacher. Using an interpretive and critical approach (Maxwell, 2019), we have analyzed the conceptions that university teachers participating in a formative course (hereinafter CGDU, from the Spanish *Curso General de Docencia Universitaria*; de-Alba-Fernández and Porlán, 2020).

It is especially noteworthy that the CGDU is voluntary. It is focused on improving teachers' teaching through Classroom Improvement Cycles (CIMA, from the Spanish *Ciclo de Mejora de Aula*) that involve going from theory to practice through reflection, design, application, and evaluation of innovations in their own classrooms (de-Alba-Fernández and Porlán, 2020). The course works around different practical teaching problems in an interactive way: aims, contents, methodology and evaluation. Although citizenship education is not explicitly addressed, reflection on didactic models leads the course to discuss the implications that university teaching practice has on citizenship training and social improvement.

The study is composed of nine university professors who completed the entire CGDU. The participants as shown in **Table 1** are 5 women and 4 men from different disciplines, 5 from Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities (Business, Administration and Management- Bus-, Philosophy- Phyl-, Civil Law- CLaw-, Procedural Law-PLaw- and Literature-Lit-) and 4 from experimental and technical areas (Physics- Phys-, Architecture- Arc-, Optics-Opt- and Chemistry-Che-). They range in age from 26 to 50 years old. Of the total, 4 have no teaching training prior to the course while 4 have participated in short courses or the course to obtain the certificate of pedagogical aptitude (known as CAP in Spanish). Only one teacher has completed a Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching.

Considering the approaches made previously, the study seeks to respond to different problems presented in **Figure 1**,

grouped in first level problems that seek to explore the conceptions of citizenship, citizenship education and university in the teachers studied, and a second level problem, which allows us to understand the obstacles and facilitators that prevent or favor reaching the desirable levels.

Instrument

Although different instruments have been used in the multiple case studies of this research, in this paper we will focus exclusively on the semi-structured interviews. Each of the interviews lasted between one and a half and 2 h. The purpose of the interview was to explore the trainee teachers' conceptions of the questions presented above. For this purpose, both real conceptions, linked to their habitual teaching practice or to their own lived reality, and ideal conceptions, referring to their ideal teaching practice or to the reality they would like to experience, were considered. In the words of Vecina-Merchante and San Román-Gago (2021) "in this discursive effort to define their educational practice, teachers move in a double ideal-real dimension, between what should be the ideal of their action, of their teaching role, and what they represent as real practice" (p. 12).

The interview is composed of a total of 23 items. Content validation was performed by 4 experts in social studies and citizenship education and 3 experts in educational research methodology. The judges had to assess the degree of relevance and clarity of the items, where 1 meant unclear/relevant and 6 meant very clear/relevant, as well as to make alternative formulations to the items. With respect to the degree of relevance, the items were rated between 5.3 and 6, while the degree of clarity was between 3.7 and 5.6. After the experts' evaluation, those items rated with lower scores were modified to facilitate their clarity and appropriateness, considering the alternative formulations proposed by the experts.

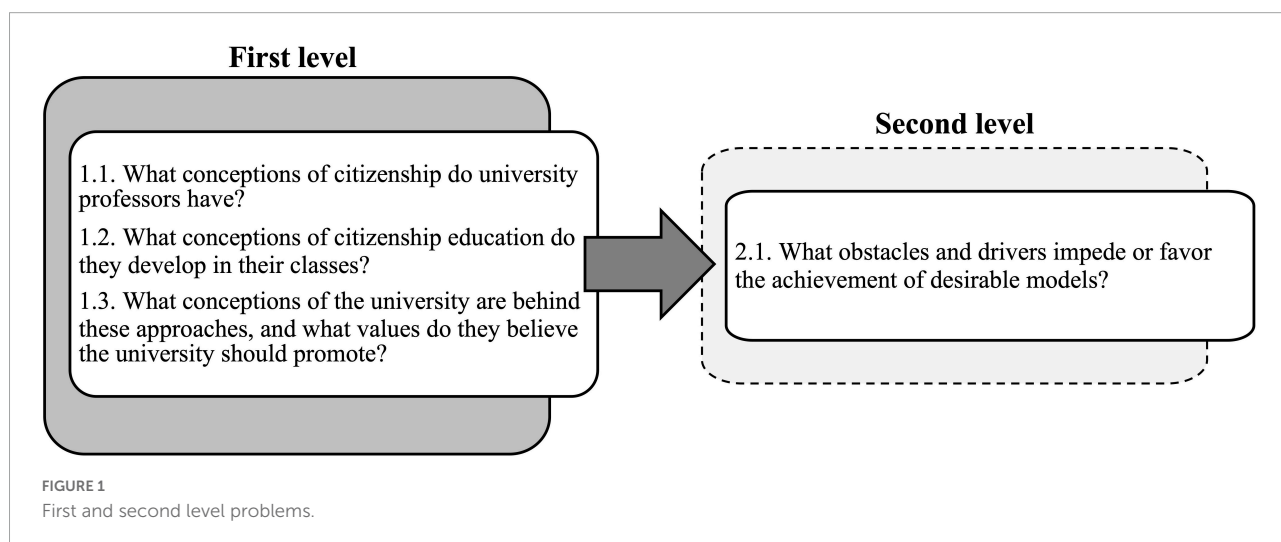
After the modification of the instrument, a second content validation was carried out by conducting a pilot test of the interview with two university professors with similar characteristics to those participating in the study. Both tests made it possible to contrast the changes to the items made. This made it possible to verify that the teachers understood the questions asked and that they were able to obtain the necessary information.

Approach to information: Collection and analysis procedures

The study was carried out between November and May of the academic year 2020/2021, as part of a broader research project with university teachers in training.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of participants.

Gender		Fields of knowledge		Pre-course teacher training	
				Typology	
Women	5	Social Sciences/Arts & Humanities	5	Master's degree in Secondary Education Teaching	1
Men	4	Experimental and Technicals	4	Short training courses/Pedagogical Adaptation Course	4
				No teacher training	4
Total	9				9



The data analysis was conducted in three phases (Maxwell, 2019): 1. Review of the interviews and the annotations made during their course; 2. Textual phase; and 3. Conceptual phase. During the textual and conceptual phases, we have relied on categorical thinking, which in the words of Freeman (2017) “seeks to determine what something is, or what it is about, and to create an order for the resulting categories” (p. 7) and on dialectical thinking derived from dialog with professors’ teaching experiences, actions, and concerns.

The data have been coded by identifying Significant Information Units (SIUs) in different categories, using content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). This study delves into three broad categories: conceptions of citizenship (Cit.), citizenship education (Cit.Edu.) and university (Uni.). For each category different levels of progression have been defined (García, 1998; Duschl, 2019), where level 1 (L1) is the simplest and level 4 (L4) the most complex through intermediate levels 2 (L2) and 3 (L3). In some cases, intermediate levels appear between levels 1–2 (L1–2) and levels 2–3 (L2–3). The SIUs registration system includes a reference that consecutively lists: professor and field of knowledge, category, level and quote number to which reference is made (example: Prof3.Arc.Cit.L1.186:47). The levels are determined from a deductive-inductive logic. Although we take into account previous studies on the issues studied (de-Alba-Fernández and Porlán, 2020; Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2021a,b), such as the types of citizenship as

defined by Westheimer (2019), we start from our reality to “determine what it is in relation to the conceptual scheme that gives it meaning” (Freeman, 2017, p. 11) and, in turn, “reorder the data to facilitate the comparison between elements of the same category, so that they collaborate with the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2019, p. 155).

Secondary categories of analysis have emerged: perceived obstacles, facilitators, and values to be promoted by the university. The latter help us to understand how the different conceptions of the university entail a background of values to be promoted. This analysis is coded in an emergent form. On the other hand, the obstacles and facilitators allow us to understand which elements make it difficult and which help the teaching staff to have desirable conceptions about the categories under study. From the point of view of teacher training, this question is key to designing personalized training strategies according to the experiences and the context.

Results: University professors’ conceptions

The findings of the study are presented with reference to the research problems presented above.

What conceptions of citizenship?

Teachers' conceptions about citizenship reflects four levels in a progression itinerary presented in [Figure 2](#).

Following the hypothesis of progression from the simplest to the most complex level, level 1 is characterized by a vision of citizenship of a legal nature:

One person inhabiting the city and practically we are all. (Prof3.Arc.Cit.L1.186:47)

A minority of teachers' conceptions of citizenship are positioned at level 2, linked to individualistic citizenship:

Being a good person with colleagues, at work, I value friends and family very much. At work, to do well, to work as a team (Prof6.Opt.Cit.L2.90:28)

The teachers participating in the study, as shown in [Figure 2](#), mostly have a conception of citizenship at level 3, linked to participation in a group or to the influence of individual actions on the collective:

A citizen is part of a society and a whole. I am not going to do whatever I want; I must be a citizen. (Prof1.Phyl.Cit.L3.187:56)

Responsible and aware of the reality around them and that even due to globalization, an act of one citizen can affect another in another part of the world. (Prof9.Che.Cit.L3.189:58)

Some of the teachers have a conception of citizenship at level 4. For them, a citizen must be committed to his or her reality, be

critical of the problems of the environment and act to transform them:

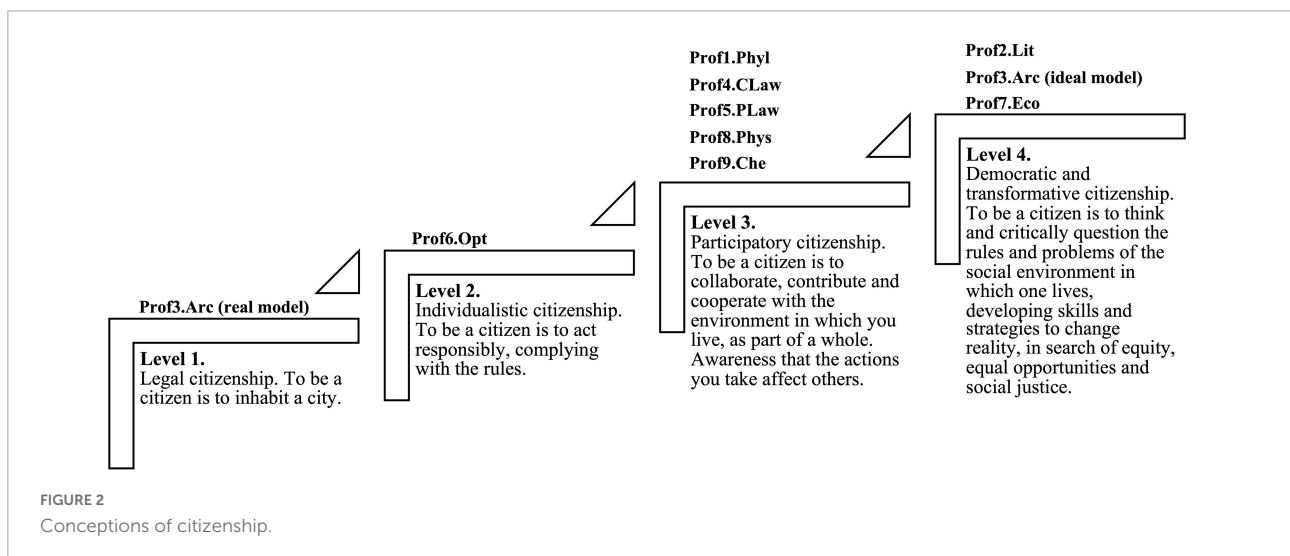
A citizen is a person who is involved in what he or she sees, in what he or she does, who reflects on problems, not only personal problems, but the problems of his or her environment. They are critical thinkers who know how to analyze what is happening. (Prof2.Lit.Cit.L4.188:52)

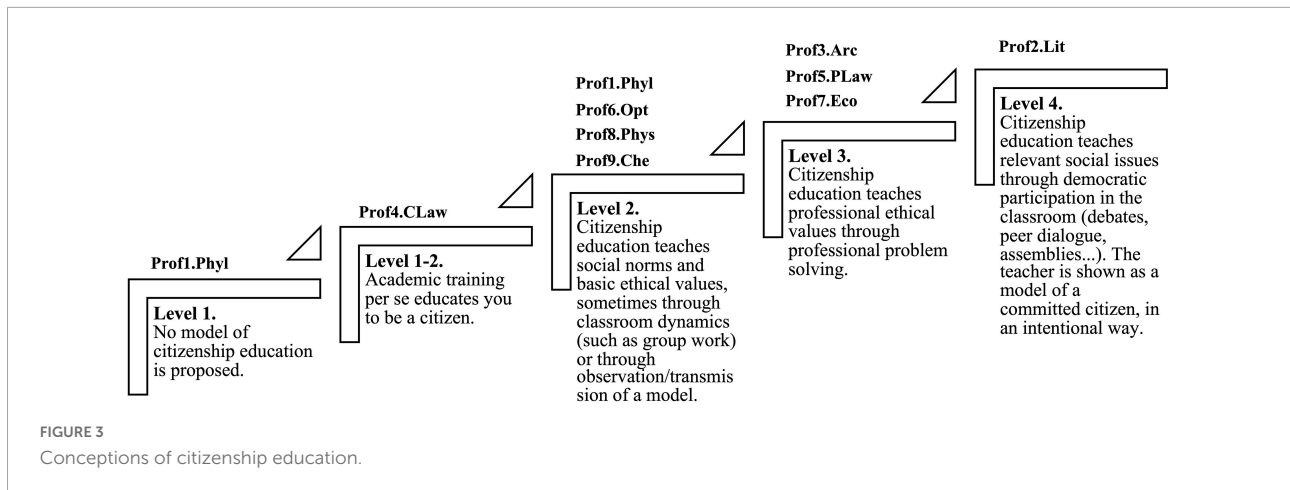
Cohabitant, not a consensual, but a creator. A cohabitant assumes the rules or the social environment with which he lives. Non-agree refers to the fact that he does not assume the social rules as immutable but develops his critical thinking to question them. The step is not only to coexist and permanently question what exists, but to equip oneself with the tools to try to change it. (Prof7.Bus.Cit.L4.101:34)

However, it is particularly noteworthy that only one teacher (Prof3.Arc) has conceptions at different levels. When referring to his real conception, his conception of citizenship is placed at level 1. However, when referring to his conception of ideal citizenship, i.e., how he would like it to be, his conception is more complex, being placed at level 4.

What conceptions of citizenship education?

The conceptions of citizenship education, however, are less elaborated. These, presented in [Figure 3](#), consider two issues with respect to citizenship education: the first, linked to the contents to be taught to educate for citizenship; the second, related to the teaching methodology to be followed to do so, therefore, how it should be done.





Level 1 in the progression ladder is characterized by not considering any model of education for citizenship, in reference to the contents that can or should be taught:

Neither have I considered it, nor do I know at what point I take it into account, I have not analyzed it. (Prof1.Phyl.Cit.Edu.L1.187:64)

The conceptions of a teacher at intermediate level 1–2 are linked to the understanding that academic training shapes you as a citizen:

That is given to you by the training, that is, the one who trains you in the academic environment is the one who must make you see or place you in that position. You are not going to be taught this at home. To be a citizen you don't have to be educated. But to be a good citizen you need a good academic formation; I would say that it is fundamental. (Prof4.CLaw.Cit.Edu.L1-2.185:55)

Most of the teachers' conceptions are located between levels 2 and 3 on the progression ladder. The conceptions situated at level 2 are characterized, at the level of content, by being based on a vision of citizenship education centered on the teaching of norms and ethical values. At the level of teaching methodology, they focus on class dynamics (teamwork, for example) or the observation of a model:

I think so, simply because they work in groups, because they must organize among themselves ... it is not very ambitious, but I think it can improve their way of being in the world. (Prof9.Che.Cit.Edu.L2.189:57)

I try in my classes that some of the characteristics I mentioned before are present and push or help students to

look for those characteristics such as personal, individual effort, collaboration. I do not do it thinking in such general terms ... but I know that betting on that is betting on a good, positive, and safe value. (Prof8.Phys.Cit.Edu.L2.183:38)

The conceptions placed at level 3 go even further. At the level of content, it is no longer only a matter of teaching basic ethical norms and values, but they also consider the introduction of ethical values linked to the professional profile of the students. In terms of methodology, they pose professional problems, giving relevance to their resolution:

If you are going to talk to me about a client's complaint, about a conflict, about how it is resolved, the most ideal thing is that you have intervened in a conflict to resolve it because then your ability to resolve it will be different than if you have read it in a book. (Prof7.Bus.Cit.Edu.L3.101:39)

I'm trying to incorporate issues ... because of course I'm getting this from training now. From two years ago to hear I have discovered the topic of urban agendas and, I don't have it as assumed as other issues, but I try for example to give it [to students] so that they take it on earlier. (Prof5.Arc.Cit.Edu.L3.186:56)

Only one teacher has a conception of citizenship education located at level 4:

Debate, democratic teaching, is a form of democratic citizenship. It is a dialog between peers in which each person has the possibility to express him/herself, to intervene, to debate, to propose ideas. I see it as a citizen system. The classroom is a small assembly, where the teacher can set the agenda, although the students can also set it. Let there be

an exchange. We are all citizens, and we can collaborate, so that our city-classroom can be better and achieve common objectives that can help us. (Prof2.Lit.Cit.Edu.L4.188:4)

As occurred previously in this progression itinerary, there are also inconsistencies in the same teacher. For example, the same teacher (Prof1.Phyl), when expressly asked about the contents to be taught, does not consider any model (level 1), while when she thinks about it from a methodological perspective, she associates it with group work and active participation in class (level 3). These inconsistencies and obstacles will be discussed below.

What conceptions of university, what values do you think the university should promote?

The conceptions of university present in the faculty also vary as shown in Figure 4. Four levels identified with different visions of university appear.

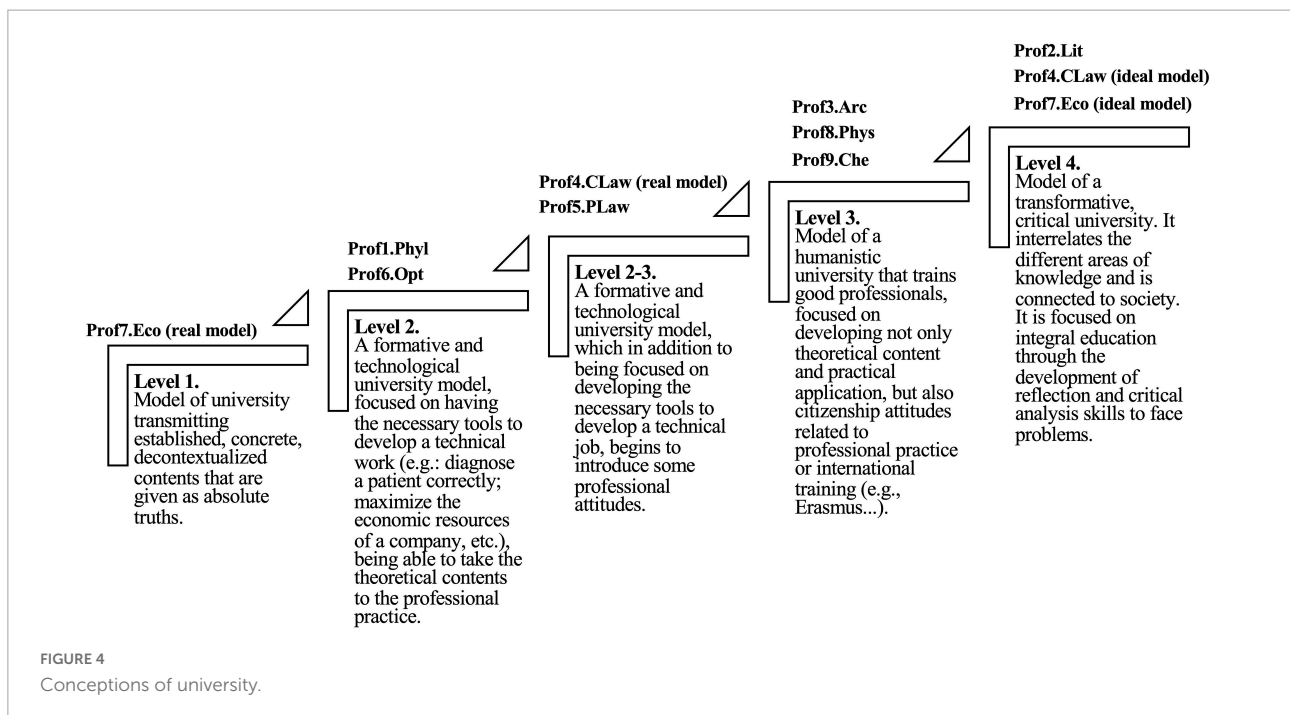
Level 1 is the conception that we consider to be the simplest, corresponding to a vision of the university as a transmitter of decontextualized content. The conceptions of the teachers investigated are not frequently situated at this level. The teacher who reflects conceptions at this level does so by criticizing the real model of university that he/she lives as a teacher, justifying that it focuses too much on working with decontextualized contents due to the specialization of the disciplines:

The university has been losing its role in a process oriented more and more to specialization, which has made the contents very concrete and, sometimes, excessively abstract. In the end you become a content machine, but not very useful. I see it ...the role of the university is not being developed in an adequate way right now. (Prof7.Bus.Uni.L1.101:36)

Most of the teaching conceptions are situated between levels 2 and 3. Level 2 is characterized by referring to a formative and technological university. The objective is to train professionals to develop technical work. The conceptions of teachers at this level are characterized by considering that the university should go beyond promoting the memorization of content, training students for “the real world.” However, when giving examples, they are linked to the professional sphere (promoting internships in companies, revaluing associate professors, etc.):

The university should, not only promote the acquisition of knowledge in a memorized form but prepare the citizen to go outside. To promote many internships in companies, to promote ..., I don't know, to give more value to associate professors. To discover not only subjects, but to bring the university closer to the outside, to the real world. (Prof1.Phyl.Uni.L2.187:69)

The conceptions of other teachers go further. Although they do not reach level 3, these teachers emphasize the need for the university to go beyond technical, professional training focused



on decontextualized content. They value the role of teaching commitment with a more involved practice that considers, for example, attitudes. However, they do not fully define their conception (level 2–3):

The university plays a “click” in that citizen training, it must play it. Although I do not know if it plays it. It will depend on the professor. But we cannot say the university either. The university is the professors who form it. And ... everything in general. If you don't commit yourself, if you give your contents ... we don't deal with the attitudinal ones. You just say what you want to say and that's it. I don't see that in law. (Prof5.PLaw.Uni.L2-3.184:40)

The conceptions of the teachers who are in level 3 consider a university that contemplates the civic implications from the professional training itself. In this sense, they argue that depending on the profession the citizenship implications may be different. In addition, they also argue the role of the university in the international training of students through Erasmus or similar programs:

A good citizen, but within your own profession, i.e., what implications does your profession have within the scope of citizenship. Politicians or architects have more impact than for example a veterinarian, I understand. (Prof3.Arc.Uni.L3.186:52)

Right now, one of the best things that the university can give you is that international training in other countries, with programs such as Erasmus. The fact of leaving your country, going into another culture, somehow makes you feel out of your place and forces you to have to make a place for yourself in this new place. (Prof8.Phys.Uni.L3.183:34)

The conceptions of the teachers located in level 4 are characterized by having a vision of the university that is more transformative, critical and with social implications:

No, the [university] model that I consider more appropriate is a more incisive and involved model, in which the content is matched with social practice, that is, in which there is a balance that is not present right now. Precisely because of the specialization or the frequent practice of this is so. I would not like that, at least in certain branches of science, such as social science, the university should be more incisive, more critical, and more involved, and try to make people think a little more. (Prof7.Bus.Uni.L4.101:42)

In this ladder of progression, there are only two teachers (Prof7.Bus and Prof4.CLaw) who present real and ideal conceptions of the university. In the case of Prof7.Bus, he shows

a real conception of the university as a transmitting university (level 1) while Prof4.CLaw shows a real conception referring to a formative and technological university (level 2–3). In both cases, their ideal conceptions refer to a transformative and critical university (level 4).

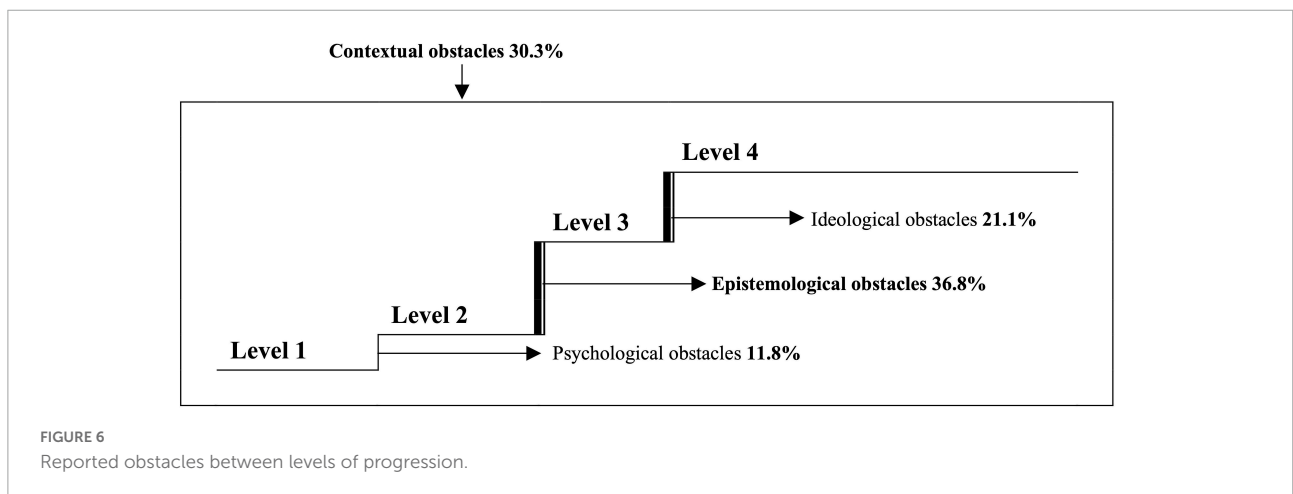
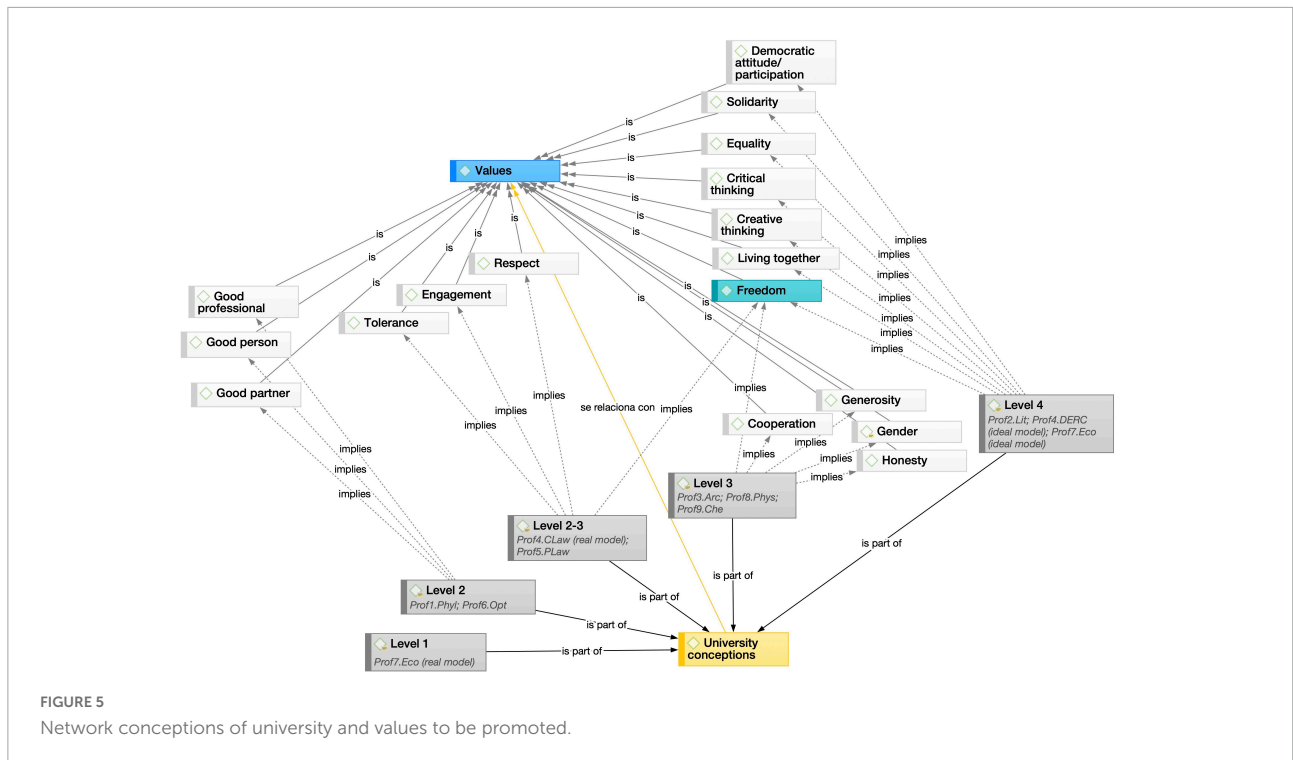
On the other hand, there is a relationship between the values that teachers believe the university should promote and their conceptions of the university (Figure 5). Teachers who have a conception of a critical university oriented to social transformation (level 4) emphasize values involving democratic attitudes and participation, critical and creative thinking, or equality, among others. Those who have conceptions linked to a university of a formative and technological nature (level 2) refer to promoting values linked to the exercise of one's own profession: being a good professional and a colleague. The conceptions proper to a vision of the humanistic university as a trainer of good professionals (level 3) are linked to values such as cooperation, generosity, or professional honesty. However, it is noteworthy how the value of freedom is presented as common, both in the conceptions of a university oriented to professional ethics (level 2–3 and level 3) and in the conceptions of a democratic university (level 4).

In general, of the first level problems analyzed, teachers show inconsistencies among their own conceptions, presenting simpler conceptions in the conceptions of education for citizenship and university, respectively, than in the conceptions of citizenship. In the analysis carried out, obstacles appear that make it difficult for teachers' conceptions to reach the desirable level. At the same time, the teachers state facilitators that help them to integrate citizenship education in their classes.

What obstacles and facilitators impede or promote the achievement of desirable levels?

The obstacles to achieving a vision of citizenship, citizenship education and university at what we consider the desirable level are linked to four aspects: contextual, psychological, epistemological, and ideological obstacles (de-Alba-Fernández and Porlán, 2020; Rivero et al., 2020). Within the levels of progression (Figure 6), the most resistant obstacles are epistemological (36.8%) located between levels 2 and 3. They are followed by ideological obstacles (21.1%) located between levels 3 and 4. Psychological (11.8%) located between levels 1 and 2 are the least present. Contextual obstacles (30.3%) also have a notable presence.

Following the progression ladder presented above, psychological obstacles are linked to overcoming a view of the students linked to a lack of their own ideas about the issue being worked on. In our study this type of obstacle is presented less frequently (11.8%), indicating that teachers have begun to overcome them. Teachers who continue to present them think



that students do not have the necessary tools or prior knowledge to work on controversial issues:

The first thing is that they are small. They are small in their legal constructs right now and they don't have all the tools that I would need to make the ideal class. (Prof5.PLaw.Psy.Obs.184:24)

I haven't gotten into analyzing political debates or analyzing real advertisements, because, apart from the fact that I could lose the whole course, I don't know if they [the

students] really have all the tools to do it properly. (Prof1.Phyl.Psy.Obs.187:22)

They also argue that students have no interest or willingness to think or learn about issues that go beyond the profession itself and involve "a world issue."

They are going to learn whatever is thrown at them, and if it is by notes all the better, and to spout it on the exam. They don't like to think because that is very difficult (Prof4.CLaw.Psy.Obs.185:44).

Students are not prepared ... they go to a classroom, and they don't expect that to happen in the classroom. They expect me to teach them optics, but they don't expect you to take a topic from the world around them, relate it directly to what they are going to learn and see an example of innovation/application of whatever it is. They don't expect that. There are students who do, that this will empower them which is the most positive thing. They will feel part of this and that they can participate in this ... and there will be other students who really find themselves in a situation they do not expect ... because nowadays one does not go to class to be taught that way (Prof8.Phys.Psy.Obs.183:22).

For their part, epistemological obstacles seem to be the most present in the study (36.8%). These resistances are linked to an absolutist vision of the discipline. Teachers who continue to present this type of obstacle are reluctant to relativize the contents they select, arguing, for example, the impossibility of introducing controversial topics because the nature of their content is very conceptual and technical:

In this subject it is very difficult to integrate them because it is a very technical subject ... so, you must get out of there a little bit. You must get out of aldehydes and ketones to through a problem or a conflict in humanity study aldehydes and ketones, for example, talk about some topic such as the atomic bomb. (Prof9.Che.Epi.Obs.189:44)

In pure and hard sciences, a class of animal physiology there is little controversy. (Prof6.Opt.Epi.Obs.90:32)

Because of the lack of relationship between citizenship education and its subject:

Citizenship education is not part of the subject as such nor of philosophy. (Prof1.Phyl.Epi.Obs.187:63)

Because of the lack of knowledge about issues linked to citizenship education, such as human rights, and the lack of sources for selecting content:

Even knowing what human rights are. I am sure that many students at the university would not know ... I must include myself ashamed of it ... what human rights are. and it is something that ... is a great advance for our society and we are not aware of it. (Prof8.Phys.Epi.Obs.183:44)

When it comes to having to structure classes around controversial topics, we are certainly not used to doing that, I don't know about other fields, but certainly in physics I don't think classes are based on trying to find these

examples. Somehow, I think it would be difficult, I don't know in which sources I could look for ... it would not be something direct. it would be necessary to dedicate a lot of effort (Prof8.Phys.Epi.Obs.183:18).

Regarding the way to introduce them, some teachers think that controversial contents can be introduced, but not in a structuring way, since within Social Sciences there is a lot of randomness. Others think it can be done, but by introducing more examples, showing again resistance to organize their discipline considering other referents such as relevant social and environmental problems:

For me the case method is fundamental. But I do not fully agree that it is the structuring and methodological basis because in a social issue, in a social science, which is fundamentally affected by people, the degree of randomness is immense. This must be compensated by a quite structured teaching and didactic project and not only based on these issues. (Prof7.Bus.Epi.Obs.101:26)

Interviewer: Do you think you could introduce other types of more controversial content? Professor: I can introduce more examples. Next year I can put in more examples and bring it a little closer ... (Prof1.Phyl.Epi.Obs.187:81)

Finally, another teacher argues that she had never considered starting from a relevant social problem or a controversial topic, and although she suggests a way to do it, she recognizes that she does not know if she will be able to do it:

Well, you just raised it with me, maybe I had never thought about it. If we have to start from a social problem or a controversial topic that affects them in their daily lives or that are problems that society has, we have to start from there, I think we have to do it from an initial question linked to the problem and a series of sub-questions or questions related to these two realities, which will make the student see the connection between the two [the discipline and the controversial topic]. In the first one they will say, but what does this have to do with organic chemistry? Little by little they will hallucinate discovering that there is a relationship, in which they are in fact involved. That's the way I would like to put it, but I don't know if I can. (Prof9.Che.Epi.Obs.189:55)

Ideological obstacles also appear with a high frequency in the study (21.1%). These involve considering that any didactic decision implies a political position and legitimizes a certain vision of the world. Those who present this type of obstacles argue that they must be neutral so as not to impregnate students with their ideology:

Interviewer: What difficulties do you have in integrating citizenship education? Professor: I can't even think of how to do it, mind you. I don't think I can think of it because maybe it's a way of being labeled by an ideology. And I don't like being labeled. I want to be a teacher, on the margin. and inevitably I will be labeled for my way of speaking, of acting, of behaving perhaps. but I don't like to impregnate my students with my ideology. because it seems to offend me. I don't know how to do it. (Prof6.Opt.Ideo.Obs.90:41)

If I talk to you from a political approach, obviously I have my idea and you have yours, but I also must recognize that I am in the middle of a classroom, I cannot express myself either, I must be as neutral as possible. (Prof7.Bus.Ideo.Obs.101:18)

Those teachers who continue to present this obstacle avoid positioning themselves in class. They argue that they feel attacked by students when they offer an argument contrary to their own:

They [students] feel outraged the moment you drop a strong argument that they don't like they think you are attacking them and that usually happens. And it shouldn't. In fact, in philosophy they should learn to argue philosophically and be able to defend an argument without thinking they are attacking you personally. (Prof1.Phyl.Ideo.Obs.187:35)

Others, again, stress the need to be neutral in class. They think that students should position themselves in class, but with disciplinary arguments, leaving aside their ideological positions, their values, or emotions. This again highlights a resistance to overcoming a false ideological neutrality about the nature of the content:

I believe that when they position themselves on two sides [students] are driven by ideology, but because they do not have sufficient legal knowledge. So, they have no other reasons to position themselves beyond ideological ones. But I believe that when you have sufficient legal knowledge you can position yourself without referring to your ideological position ... which you can have separately but which I believe is not relevant here. For example, on the issue of abortion, you will think one thing and I will think another, and we will certainly have an ideological influence, but I don't think it is necessary to show it in class. In class you can position yourself in one way or another, but because legally you believe one thing or another (Prof4.CLaw.Ideo.Obs.185:63).

I tell them, I understand that personally values and emotions are important, but we are looking at argumentation and we

are talking about argument ... and they do not enter ... I am very sorry. (Prof1.Phyl. Ideo.Obs.187:30)

In turn, another teacher argues that she had never considered her teaching responsibility to offer her students a complex view of the problems of our world, or that she had never even considered working on more controversial issues:

I personally had not seen myself as that, as a party that could have that responsibility. Now that you say that I see the space I must be able to act in that direction. I had not taken it as a responsibility, but I think we do have it, even if only to a small extent. (Prof8.Phys.Ideo.Obs.183:30)

I have not worked with controversial issues because this is the third time, I have taught the subject. Previous projects have been developed on more neutral issues. (Prof3.Arc.Ideo.Obs.186:390)

Similarly, another teacher states that she can work on more controversial issues in the classroom that have to do, for example, with political discourses. However, she declares insecurity to do so. At the same time, she argues that she introduces examples of foreign politics to avoid political polarization if she uses examples from the Spanish context:

That can go away whole classes and classes and, besides, it can get messed up in the country we are in ... the binary way we have of characterizing this type of ... especially in politics.it is complicated. (Prof1.Phyl.Ideo.Obs.187:27)

The policy examples I use are usually foreign policy. (Prof1.Phyl.Ideo.Obs.187:28)

One of the teachers, when reflecting on her responsibility as a teacher to educate citizenship, also states that she herself, and even the system, allows you to practice your profession without stopping to reflect on the role you have in the university or on the priorities of your teaching practice. Therefore, there are also ideological resistances linked to the very dynamics of the teaching profession at the university:

You can go a year without having thought about what your real role in the university is, because it is not there as a priority when in fact it should be the priority. That model doesn't really exist because nobody can put it into practice, it's a very nice theory. What we are talking about, what you are asking me is not a question of money or budget. It is a question of knowing what our priority, our objective is and trying to achieve it. (Prof9.Che.Ideo.Obs.189:69)

For their part, contextual obstacles (30.3%), although not placed within the progression of levels affect the development of teaching practice, also about the introduction of citizenship education. As shown in **Figure 7**, contextual obstacles linked to issues external to the teacher have a greater presence. Among others, some linked to the dynamics of the university itself stand out, such as competitiveness or job instability. Others are directly linked to the subject, such as the organization of the curriculum or the amount of syllabus. Internal obstacles appear less frequently. Teachers have a margin of action and a responsibility to deal with them. Those stated are lack of training and teaching experience in matters related to citizenship education, their own teaching performance in the classroom, or lack of time to work on the entire syllabus.

The overall results linked to the different obstacles that appear (**Figure 8**) show how, from a declarative level, teachers who have conceptions that are at more desirable levels with respect to the categories analyzed only reflect obstacles linked to contextual issues, as in the case of Prof2.Lit. In the rest of the cases, a combination of different obstacles is reflected.

On the other hand, some of the teachers participating in the study affirm that there are facilitators who help them to introduce citizenship education in their classes (**Figure 9**). It is especially highlighted that the teacher training received and the participation in the research (especially with the interview) help them to change their vision of citizenship education. In addition, they consider other elements as key, such as having nearby successful models of inclusion of citizenship education in the university or directly introducing social movements such as Black Lives Matter. It is especially noteworthy that the teacher (Prof2.Lit) who shows more internal coherence in his conceptions declares elements that help him to introduce

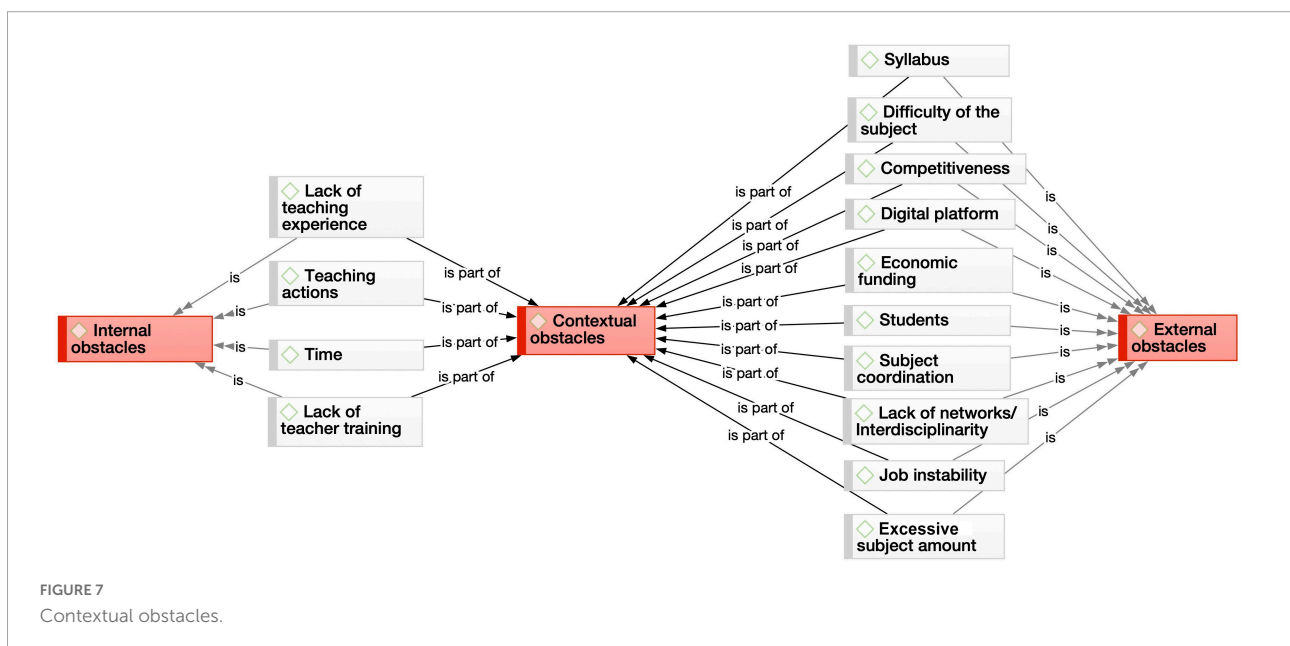
citizenship education such as the fact of participating as an activist in movements for social justice, the deep reflection on his own role as a citizen or the link he makes between the university and society through concrete proposals.

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis carried out on the conceptions of university professors has allowed us to identify different itineraries in progression. These point to the fact that the teaching staff participating in this study have more complex conceptions of citizenship than of citizenship education and university.

Thus, the majority conceptions of citizenship refer to an idea of participatory citizenship, characterized by collaborating and cooperating with the environment, as well as being aware of the influence of one's own actions on others (level 3). On the other hand, the conception of education for citizenship focuses more on methodological issues than on the content itself (level 2). These are based on increasing student participation through classroom dynamics, such as working in small groups.

Although teachers have a conception of participatory citizenship and connected to the environment, they do not have conceptions of citizenship education that consider the introduction of this type of content as fundamental, mostly alluding to the fact that citizenship education focuses on teaching social norms and basic ethical values. In this sense, there is a strong resistance to overcome an epistemological obstacle based on the difficulty of integrating contents that go beyond the discipline itself. The study by [Cotton \(2006\)](#) already showed a refusal of university professors to include more open issues, such as sustainable development, arguing a lack of



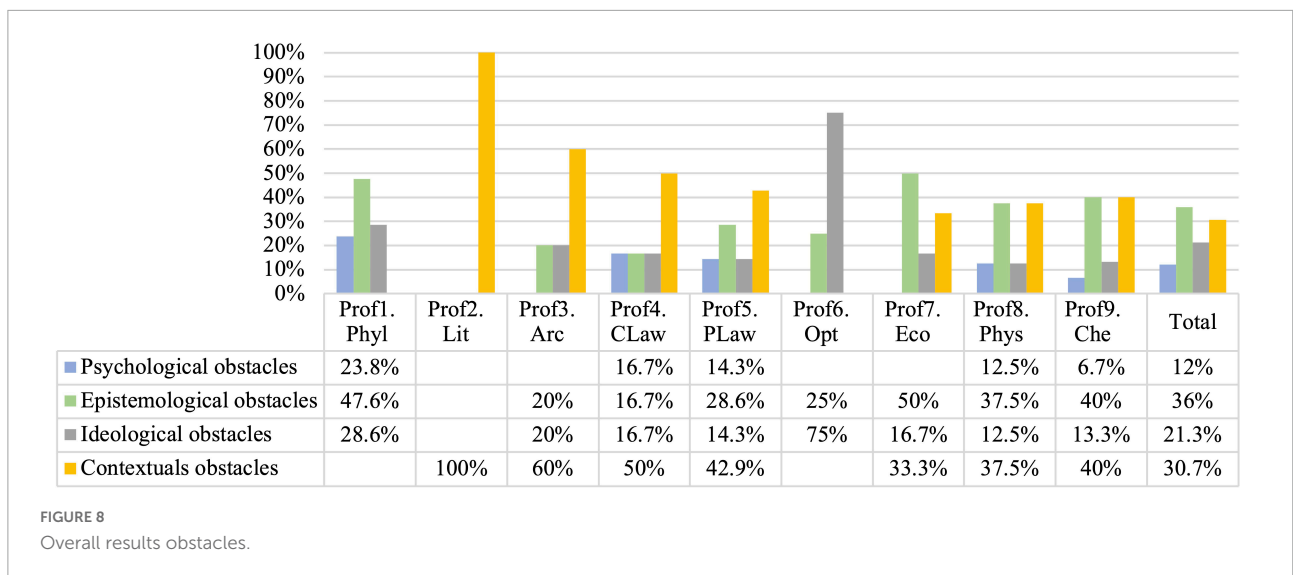


FIGURE 8 Overall results obstacles.

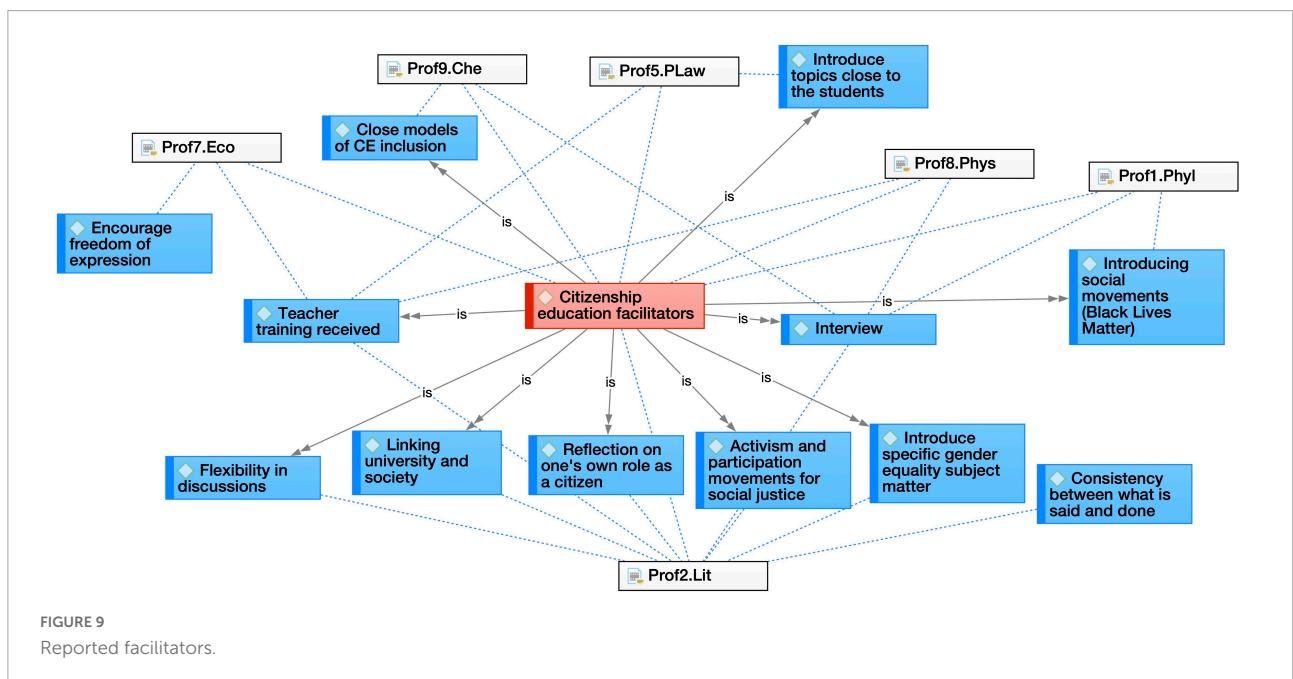


FIGURE 9 Reported facilitators.

connection with the discipline or with the content to be worked on. The study developed by [Rivero et al. \(2020\)](#) also reflects the difficulty for teachers to overcome epistemological resistance “based on the idea that disciplines contain closed and absolute knowledge” (p. 31). This difficulty in relativizing their own disciplinary knowledge and considering the influence of social and historical advances, as well as the challenges and problems that confront us, means that teachers, although they have a conception of participatory citizenship in their environment, do not have a conception of education for citizenship that really favors the introduction of relevant social problems or controversial issues that allow students to participate in that environment.

In this sense, the results of the study point to an obstacle of an ideological nature, since teachers argue that they do not introduce relevant social problems or controversial issues in the classroom to avoid having their professional practice questioned or because they must be neutral in class. In the case of some teachers, they justify those students feel attacked when they offer an argument contrary to their own. However, according to the study developed by [McAvoy \(2017\)](#) with 518 high school students, 79% consider that their teachers should give their political views in the classroom, without imposing them. The study by [Rivero et al. \(2020\)](#) likewise points out the ideological resistances of teachers to relativize teaching contents by linking them to “the [false] neutrality of scientific knowledge” (p. 31).

In the study presented, some of the teachers who point to the possibility of introducing controversial issues or relevant social problems to work on citizenship education argue that this can be done through the introduction of examples and not in a structuring way. To a large extent, they do not consider the approach of relevant social problems as articulators of their didactic proposals and much less as open questions that need to be debated and that involve giving diverse answers, rethinking our own social coexistence (McAvoy and Hess, 2013). Therefore, teachers tend to avoid dealing with these issues, while when they address them, it is in an anecdotal and concrete way (Kitson and McCully, 2005). Another existing difficulty in being able to work on controversial issues is the very lack of training in the field (Pace, 2019; Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès, 2022). In this sense, the teachers in this study declare contextual obstacles of an internal nature linked to a lack of general training on university teaching and, specifically, on citizenship education, which could justify their own conceptions.

In turn, the results of the study reflect the existence of facilitators, referring to elements that help to introduce citizenship education in classroom practice. On the one hand, it is common for teachers to positively value both the teacher training received in the course and the interview itself as elements that help them to change their vision of citizenship education. Likewise, other facilitators are included, such as participation as an activist in movements for social justice or the effort to strengthen the link between the university and society itself, through specific activities. The study developed by McCowan (2014) already showed that the commitment and attitudes of the teaching staff regarding the problems of the environment influence the treatment given to them in the classroom. For their part, Schugurensky and Myers (2003) point out how teachers' past and present experiences, such as their participation in social movements, influence their practices and approaches to teaching citizenship. Therefore, we should not overlook the fact that teachers' own profile and experiences as citizens influence their own conceptions of their teaching.

With respect to the teachers' conceptions of the university, it is especially noteworthy that they are mostly linked to a formative and technological university (level 2, level 2–3) and to a humanistic university that trains good professionals (level 3). These visions are still aligned with a perspective of student training focused on developing professional and business skills (Schattle, 2008; Stein, 2015) relegating to the background, and sometimes almost forgetting, ethical and citizenship skills (Esteban, 2018). From this logic, the university is at the service of commodification and obtaining economic capital (Giroux, 2015).

In this sense, and linked to the conceptions of the university, the faculty alluded to external contextual obstacles such as the curriculum itself, job instability or the lack of interdisciplinary networks. The university as an institution has a key and

relevant role in the commitment and social responsibility to change (Larrán-Jorge and Andrades-Peña, 2017; Estelles and Fischman, 2020) to favor a democratic citizen space, in which the establishment of networks that address common problems or the training of university teachers as critical intellectuals are promoted (Apple et al., 2022). In this sense, the university as an institution also has a responsibility in the policies it develops and must promote and build a sense of social responsibility through the training of its students, the research it carries out, the management it implements and the citizenship and civic values it promotes (Larrán-Jorge and Andrades-Peña, 2017).

On the other hand, the results of this study indicate that there is a correlation between the values that the university should promote and the conception of the university that underlies this approach. Thus, a critical and transformative university (level 4) is linked to values such as democratic participation or critical and creative thinking, while a university linked to professional training (level 2–3, level 3) is related to issues such as respect or professional honesty. Therefore, reconstructing university models also requires a rethinking about the values it should promote (Escámez-Sánchez and Peris-Cancio, 2021).

The possible limitations of the study are that the results themselves are framed within case studies in a specific context. In future research, the study samples will be expanded to be able to carry out typologies of teachers' conceptions. Likewise, a more in-depth study of the obstacles and facilitators presented will help to design training strategies that will have an impact on them.

In conclusion and following Giroux (2020) "education is a central tool of politics and always plays a major role – in a visible or overlapping way – in any ideological project" (p. 3). Hence, teacher training in citizenship education issues should continue to be strengthened, being convenient to introduce further reflection on "knowledge powerful" (Harland and Wald, 2018) to help teachers to progressively overcome epistemological and ideological obstacles, becoming aware of the need to introduce contents that really enable students to be competent on a professional and citizen level. In the words of Mathison (2019) "although everyday resistance is individual, local and small, through accumulation and narrative storytelling these acts not only impact the quotidian life, but potentially larger social change and class struggle" (p. 55).

Data availability statement

The datasets generated during this current study are not publicly available because the identities of some participants are visible, undermining privacy protection. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to NP-R, nperez4@us.es, Nd-A-F, ndealba@us.es, and EN-M, enavarro5@us.es.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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