

How Do Spanish-Speaking Populations Construct Their Professional Trajectories Across the Life Course? A Scoping Review

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**Support** - Proyecto Centenario by Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (N.º 039.789/2025).**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Data extraction.**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202680042**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 10 August 2026 and was last updated on 10 August 2026.**INTRODUCTION**

Review question / Objective How have professional trajectories among Spanish-speaking populations been conceptualized across the life course, and what individual, social, and contextual factors have been reported to influence their development?

Rationale The scientific literature on professional trajectories and the future of professions is dispersed across multiple disciplinary traditions that rarely intersect. One body of research focuses on automation, artificial intelligence, and the reconfiguration of professional work (Faulconbridge et al., 2023; Fenwick & Edwards, 2016; Susskind & Susskind, 2018), whereas another examines employability, school-to-work transitions, career development, and professional identity (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Tomlinson, 2008; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019). Additional studies address specific dimensions of professional trajectories, such as career choice, career adaptability, job satisfaction, employability,

leadership, career planning, and the transition to retirement. Even the most recent reviews tend to focus on isolated aspects of the phenomenon—for example, employability or the impact of artificial intelligence—without integrating the multiple stages that constitute a professional trajectory across the life course (Jung et al., 2024).

As a result, the available body of knowledge remains fragmented both conceptually and methodologically. Considerable variation persists in how professional trajectories are defined, the constructs used to examine them, the factors proposed to explain their development, and the outcomes selected to assess them. Likewise, there is limited integrative evidence regarding how professional trajectories evolve as individuals progress through different stages of the life course—from career choice to retirement—and concerning the continuities and transitions that characterize this developmental process.

A scoping review is therefore an appropriate methodological approach to map and synthesize the existing evidence, identify the principal conceptualizations, theoretical frameworks,

dimensions, and factors associated with professional trajectories, and highlight areas where important knowledge gaps remain. Beyond describing how professional trajectories have been investigated, this review will examine whether the literature documents changes in these trajectories as individuals age or transition through different stages of the life course, thereby providing a comprehensive and longitudinal perspective on professional development.

From this perspective, the present review is grounded in the premise that professional trajectories constitute a dynamic and continuous process of construction, adaptation, and transformation that unfolds throughout the life course. Accordingly, this review seeks to identify how professional trajectories have been conceptualized and investigated, the principal dimensions that characterize them, the factors that influence their development, and the ways in which they evolve across different life stages. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the contemporary transformations affecting professional work and the role of higher education in shaping individuals' professional futures.

Condition being studied For much of the twentieth century, higher education embodied a relatively stable social promise: providing access to recognized, socially legitimate, and comparatively predictable professional careers. However, this promise has gradually weakened in response to profound technological, educational, social, and labor market transformations that have reshaped the nature of professional work. These changes have affected the production and validation of expertise, professional authority, the distribution of responsibilities, occupational jurisdictions, and the technological mediation through which professional services are delivered (Faulconbridge et al., 2023; Fenwick & Edwards, 2016; Noordegraaf, 2020; Susskind & Susskind, 2018).

Research on employability indicates that although a university degree remains an important prerequisite for professional practice, it no longer guarantees access to stable professional careers (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). Tomlinson (2008) demonstrated that many university students perceive higher education credentials as necessary but insufficient in increasingly competitive labor markets, where prior experience, institutional prestige, transferable skills, and other forms of capital have become essential differentiating factors. Likewise, Boden and Nedeva (2010) argue that employability discourses have increasingly shifted responsibility for professional success toward individuals and higher education

institutions, while placing less emphasis on the structural transformations occurring within labor markets and the organization of professional work. At the same time, universities continue to serve as privileged environments for the construction of professional identities, future expectations, and career aspirations. Tomlinson and Jackson (2019) argue that professional identity develops progressively through socially mediated and anticipatory processes within a context in which the future of work is characterized by increasing uncertainty. Consequently, contemporary transformations affect not only occupational opportunities but also the ways individuals envision their professional futures, attribute meaning to their work, and make career-related decisions throughout their lives.

Current evidence further suggests that professional trajectories are dynamic processes that evolve throughout the life course. They begin with career choice, continue through higher education, the transition into the labor market, career establishment, professional maturity, and ultimately the transition to retirement. At each of these stages, individual, family, educational, organizational, technological, and policy-related factors interact to shape professional opportunities, decisions, and experiences. Nevertheless, these processes have largely been investigated in isolation, with most studies focusing on specific career stages or particular professions. Such fragmentation limits a comprehensive understanding of how professional trajectories evolve across the life course and which elements remain stable or change as individuals age.

Within this context, there is a clear need to examine how professional trajectories have been conceptualized in the scientific literature, identify the dimensions that underpin them, determine the factors associated with their development, and explore how these trajectories evolve as individuals move through different stages of the life course within an environment characterized by rapid transformations in professional work, higher education, and labor markets.

METHODS

Search strategy This scoping review will be conducted in accordance with the methodological guidance developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for scoping reviews. The reporting of the review findings will follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) statement.

The search strategy will be tailored to the indexing terms and search syntax of each electronic database. The following search strategies will be used:

Web of Science

Topic=((career* OR work* OR employability OR occupation* OR "professional work") AND ("career identity" OR "career adaptability" OR "career construction" OR "career development" OR "career planning" OR "meaning of work" OR "future of work" OR "perspective career" OR "perspective work" OR "perspective profession" OR "perception career" OR "perception work" OR "perception profession" OR "expectation career" OR "expectation work" OR "expectation profession" OR "career development" OR "career trajectories" OR "future orientation" OR "career aspirations" OR "career optimism" OR "career decision making" OR "career choice" OR "possible selves" OR "career self-management" OR "career maturity" OR "career transitions"))

Scopus

TITLE-ABS-KEY =((career* OR work* OR employability OR occupation* OR "professional work") AND("career identity" OR "career adaptability" OR "career construction" OR "career development" OR "career planning" OR "career trajectories" OR "career transitions"OR "career aspirations" OR "career optimism" OR "career decision making" OR "career choice" OR "career maturity" OR "career self-management" OR "future orientation" OR "future of work" OR "meaning of work" OR "possible selves" OR "perspective career" OR "perspective work" OR "perspective profession" OR "perception career" OR "perception work" OR "perception profession" OR "expectation career" OR "expectation work" OR "expectation profession"))

PubMed

Title/Abstract = ((career* OR work* OR employability OR occupation* OR "professional work") AND ("career identity" OR "career adaptability"OR "career construction"OR "career development"[OR "career planning" OR "career trajectories" OR "career transitions" OR "career aspirations" OR "career optimism" OR "career decision making" OR "career choice" OR "career maturity" OR "career self-management" OR "future orientation" OR "future of work"OR "meaning of work" OR "possible selves" OR "perspective career" OR "perspective work" OR "perspective profession" OR "perception career" OR "perception work" OR "perception profession" OR "expectation career" OR "expectation work" OR "expectation profession"))

Scielo

"significado del trabajo" OR "futuro del trabajo" OR "identidad laboral" OR "valores laborales".

Participant or population Individuals at any stage of the life course whose professional trajectory is undergoing construction, development, transition, or consolidation, from one or more of the following countries: Mexico; Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama; Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic; Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Intervention Not applicable.

Comparator Not applicable.

Study designs to be included Qualitative, quantitative and mixed empirical studies and literature reviews and scoping reviews of qualitative, quantitative and mixed empirical studies.

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criteria

Population: Individuals at any stage of the life course whose professional trajectory is undergoing construction, development, transition, or consolidation.

Studies whose populations consist exclusively of participants from one or more of the following countries: Mexico; Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama; Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic; Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. For multinational studies, only those reporting country-specific findings for at least one of the eligible countries will be included, thereby allowing the extraction and interpretation of evidence relevant to the target population.

Studies that examine the construction, development, management, or projection of professional trajectories (career) and address at least one of the following career-related constructs: career identity, career adaptability, career construction, career development, career planning, career aspirations, career optimism, career decision-making, career choice, career maturity, career self-management, career transitions, future orientation, the future of work, the meaning of work, possible selves, perceptions, expectations, or other related concepts concerning professional trajectories and career development. Studies exploring how individuals interpret, redefine, construct, or envision their professional future.

Language: English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Publication period: 2010 to 2026. This time restriction was established because the literature on career adaptability, employability, and the future of work has expanded substantially since 2010.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies whose unit of analysis is exclusively the organization, the profession, the curriculum, or the educational system, without examining how individuals construct, develop, or envision their professional trajectories.

Letters, editorials, commentaries, conference abstracts, and study protocols will be excluded.

Information sources Only the following electronic databases: Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed and Scielo.

Main outcome(s) The findings will be presented using both descriptive and thematic synthesis to map the characteristics of the available evidence and identify patterns across the literature. Geographic distribution of the scientific literature. The synthesis will include:

Geographic distribution of the scientific literature.

Temporal trends in publication.

Authorship patterns and countries contributing to research in the field.

Predominant theoretical and methodological approaches.

Main topics addressed in the literature.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis Not applicable.

Strategy of data synthesis The included studies will be synthesized using:

Descriptive analysis

Thematic analysis

The expected thematic categories include:

Construction of professional trajectories

Professional future orientation

Career management and adaptability

Subjective relationship with work

Associated factors

Life course and career transitions

Professional trajectory outcomes

Two reviewers will independently participate in the study selection process to determine study eligibility. Any disagreements regarding study inclusion will be resolved through discussion or, if consensus cannot be reached, by consultation with a third reviewer.

Quality Assessment

In accordance with the methodological guidance for scoping reviews, no formal assessment of the methodological quality or risk of bias of the included studies will be conducted. The primary purpose of a scoping review is to map the available evidence, identify the main conceptual and methodological approaches, and highlight gaps in the existing knowledge, rather than to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions or the

certainty and quality of the evidence. Therefore, a formal critical appraisal of the included studies is not considered an essential methodological requirement for achieving the objectives of this review.

Subgroup analysis Not applicable.

Sensitivity analysis Not applicable.

Language restriction Only studies published in English, Spanish, or Portuguese will be considered for inclusion.

Country(ies) involved Chile and Mexico.

Keywords Professional trajectories; Life course; Career development; Career transitions; Career adaptability; Career planning; Professional identity; Higher education; Future of work; Employability.

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