

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Navigating the Storm: A Duo-Autoethnography on Resisting Shipwreck in Times of Educational Change

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the emotional and professional challenges educators face in an era of increasing bureaucratic demands, technological acceleration, and evolving educational landscapes. Using duo-autoethnography, the researchers engaged in reflective walking conversations, enabling a dialogic and introspective exploration of their lived experiences as teachers. Grounded in Rosa's theory of social acceleration, the study identifies four dimensions of alienation: from actions, time, space, and self. These forms of alienation disrupt educators' vocational passion and professional identity, leading to emotional exhaustion and detachment from their pedagogical mission. The findings highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms that reduce administrative burdens, enhance teacher autonomy, and prioritise relational dynamics within educational communities. By fostering trust, meaningful connections, and reflective practices, educational institutions can sustain teachers' commitment to the transformative potential of education. This research contributes a novel methodological and theoretical lens for understanding the complexities of teacher identity and well-being in contemporary education.

1 | Introduction

Perhaps it's the accumulated fatigue of the day, or maybe it's the weariness built up over the past few months. The truth is, we feel alienated from our profession; we suspect it doesn't belong to us—or we don't belong to it. These days we've spent discussing teaching have made us aware of where we stand and the negative attitudes surrounding education and the teachers who work within it. It's inevitable to feel a pang of pain, right between the chest and stomach, and a certain anger toward all the obstacles placed in our way. Those of us dedicated to public education find ourselves in a critical moment. The neoliberal climate does not support our ability to unite, fight for

better conditions, and advocate for improvements in the system. We are in a time where the focus is on “being yourself and only worrying about yourself.” Given this, it's difficult to find reasons to get out of bed and go to work, just as it is challenging not to encounter colleagues suffering from burnout early in their careers. Despite all this, we must believe that there is a glimmer of hope amidst so much despair: nostalgia for a better past and confidence that a different future is possible remind us that we still have ideals, even if they are significantly weakened (Conversation between M. and G., 18 August 2024).

Today, pursuing a career in teaching is a risky endeavour.¹ The enthusiasm and vocation that are supposed to characterise

educators have increasingly become arguments used to justify their exploitation and critical suppression, investing time, effort, tears, and anxieties into a profession that increasingly fails to meet their life expectations.

The concept of ‘vocation’ in teaching, which appears frequently throughout this article, refers to the deep sense of purpose and calling that educators often experience in relation to their profession. Teaching extends beyond the bounds of a profession; it represents an enduring commitment, a navigation through constantly shifting dynamics. Educators, akin to individuals clinging to a makeshift raft, place their trust in the transformative potential of knowledge, the ability of young learners to reconstruct disrupted understandings, and their own capacity to guide these efforts toward an evolving horizon. Each academic year resembles an uncertain voyage, marked by the effort to establish the classroom as a stable and inclusive environment where intellectual growth and emotional grounding occur. In the initial moments when an idea takes root or curiosity ignites, educators find affirmation of their role, even amid the uncertainties of change. This metaphor underscores our research on teacher identity—a dynamic set of beliefs, values, emotions, and practices that shape how one perceives and acts as an educational professional (González-Calvo 2025; González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2017)—in times of transition, highlighting how external pressures and societal shifts challenge educators’ sense of purpose and resilience.

Historically, vocation in teaching has been tied to a sense of moral duty and intrinsic motivation, where educators feel driven not just by external rewards but by a personal commitment to fostering learning and shaping young minds. This notion of vocation is central to understanding the disillusionment many educators face as they grapple with increasing bureaucratic pressures and diminishing autonomy. In the context of this study, vocation is understood not only as a professional calling but also as an emotional investment that gives educators a sense of identity and fulfilment in their work. However, as the study demonstrates, this sense of vocation is increasingly under threat as external pressures diminish educators’ ability to engage in meaningful, creative teaching. This erosion of vocational passion is one of the key elements of the alienation discussed in the study, where the professional commitment to teaching becomes overshadowed by the demands of external performance metrics (González-Calvo 2013). As Zafra (2017) explains, the current working conditions and the growing surveillance and bureaucratisation of tasks risk neutralising educators, preemptively exhausting those who have chosen this profession and diminishing their intellectual passion. Additionally, a growing body of international research has highlighted how teacher identity is shaped and reshaped by global educational reforms and sociopolitical contexts (Day and Gu 2010; Fullan 2015; Grey 2020; Hobson and Maxwell 2017). These studies demonstrate that teachers worldwide experience similar pressures related to accountability, standardisation, and workload intensification, which collectively impact their professional autonomy and emotional well-being (Grey 2020). Engaging with this international scholarship allows us to situate our findings within a broader global landscape, underscoring the universality of the challenges faced by educators and the urgency of identifying pathways to foster teacher resilience and preserve vocational passion.

However, in this era where we are enslaved by ourselves (Han 2015), teachers are compelled to work with a semblance of happiness, creating an illusion of freedom that masks the relentless drive and overwork. This perpetuates a system where individuals only know two states: success or failure. The profession, understood solely in mercantile terms, becomes increasingly dehumanised, producing insecure, hopeless educators who are condemned to self-destruction. This educational system, which relies on performance-driven teachers, self-exploitation, and a ‘can-do’ mentality (Han 2015), ultimately leads to excessive burnout and necessitates overstimulation to function, or else it results in anxiety and abandonment of the profession. Nonetheless, it is important to note that amid these challenges, there are emerging positive trends in education. For instance, there is growing recognition of teacher well-being and mental health as legitimate concerns (Edwards-Groves and Kemmis 2016; Martínez-León et al. 2024). Collaborative professional learning communities, peer-support groups, and innovative pedagogical approaches have started to gain traction, potentially reinvigorating teachers’ vocational passion (Bebegal Vázquez et al. 2024; Martínez-León et al. 2024). Furthermore, some educational policies have shifted toward supporting reflective practices, allowing educators to maintain greater autonomy in developing creative and inclusive learning spaces.

This study delves deeply into the evolving identities of teachers and students under bureaucratic pressures and social transformations. It explores three critical aspects of identity change: the alteration of teacher identities in response to bureaucratic encroachments; the transformation of student identities as direct, open interactions with teachers are overshadowed by structured, formal educational settings; and the repercussions of these identity shifts on student mental health and behaviour. By integrating these perspectives into the thematic structure, this paper aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how identity dynamics are pivotal in shaping educational experiences and outcomes.

On the other hand, we believe it is important to explain the influence of the authors’ personal and professional identities on the research. As both the researchers and participants in this duo-autoethnography, and as partners in a personal relationship, our roles shaped both the data collection and analysis processes. Our deep familiarity with each other facilitated open and honest communication, creating a conducive environment for exploring shared experiences. However, this dual role also introduced potential biases. This transparent acknowledgment of our positionality is crucial for understanding the context of the research and the influence of our personal and professional identities on the findings. Following our shared reading of the book *Stoner* (2012), we began to discuss our experiences as educators, the challenges of failure, and the passion for teaching, and how to find personal and professional fulfilment in a profession marked by change and conflict. Through an in-depth dialogue that takes the form of moving conversations in contact with nature, we reflect on how we have seen the profession and our professional teaching identity evolve over the last few years. The objective of our study is to explore how the passage of time in the teaching profession and the changes in current teaching conditions affect

educators' personal and professional satisfaction, analysing how bureaucratisation, the commercialisation of the profession, changes in student relationships, and new educational trends contribute to burnout and dehumanisation, while seeking ways to preserve passion and commitment. Additionally, we aim to demonstrate that this reflective and dialogic process does not merely describe the teacher identity, but can also transform it. This unveiling of experiences, framed by Rosa's theory of social acceleration, opens new possibilities for understanding and reconfiguring who we are as teachers, in terms of beliefs, commitment, and vocation (Rosa 2010, 2013, 2019).

2 | Teaching in Times of Change: An Analysis From the Perspective of Social Acceleration Theory

The theory of social acceleration, proposed by Hartmut Rosa (2010, 2013), has been essential in understanding the transformations that have reconfigured social dynamics, particularly in professions such as teaching. Social acceleration manifests in three main dimensions: technical, social, and the pace of life. Each of these dimensions has profound implications for the structure of educational work, influencing both working conditions and the subjective experiences of teachers, who face increasing pressure, creating a work environment increasingly characterised by risk, uncertainty, and alienation (González-Calvo 2020b; Zafra 2024).

According to Rosa (2013), technical acceleration is one of the most evident ways this phenomenon is experienced. In education, it translates into the rapid evolution of technologies and teaching methods. The emergence of new digital tools, virtual platforms, and innovative methodologies has forced teachers to continually adapt to these transformations (Wang et al. 2023). This constant updating process increases bureaucratic burdens, as educators must invest time in training and managing the introduction of these new resources into their daily practice (Zafra 2024). This additional effort not only increases the workload but can also lead to a temporal alienation. Teachers feel their time is fragmented into multiple administrative and technological tasks, losing the opportunity to pause and critically reflect on their pedagogical methods (González-Calvo 2020b; Zafra 2024). The speed with which they must adapt to new technological demands deprives them of the ability to engage in slow, reflective teaching, negatively affecting their relationship with educational practice and with their students (González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2021; Patrikakou 2015).

Social acceleration, in turn, manifests in the intensification of social changes and the growing competition that characterises the current educational system. This acceleration has a direct impact on the teaching profession, as contemporary educational policies tend to prioritise measurable outcomes and performance standards (González-Calvo 2020a, 2020b; González-Calvo, Hernando-Garijo, et al. 2020). Both educational administrations and families impose expectations that pressure teachers to meet external objectives, often disconnected from the pedagogical principles that guide their vocation (Mausethagen 2013). This competitive environment leads to an alienation of actions, where educators are forced to adjust their practice according to

external demands, rather than exercising their professional autonomy (Zafra 2017, 2024). Teaching, which should be a space for creativity and reflection, becomes a set of tasks to fulfil, stripping teachers of their decision-making power and disconnecting them from their true vocation.

On the other hand, the acceleration of the pace of life (Rosa 2010, 2013) in the educational sphere is particularly evident. Teachers find themselves immersed in a continuous work cycle, with tight deadlines and constant demands that prevent them from finding the necessary time to reflect on their practice or to develop their own professional growth (González-Calvo 2020b; Zafra 2024). This uninterrupted work cycle generates a deep sense of physical and emotional exhaustion, identified as one of the main causes of burnout syndrome (Han 2015; Rosa 2013). Educators are trapped in a dynamic that prioritises efficiency over their well-being, leading to an alienation of self, disconnecting them from their professional and personal identity. This exhaustion is exacerbated by a lack of institutional support, as educational policies tend to emphasise productivity and control over the mental health and well-being of teachers (Ghamrawi et al. 2023). Regarding this theory, it is crucial to emphasise that teacher identity formation occurs concurrently with these accelerated demands: educators experience this social acceleration as a force that destabilises their beliefs and practices, reconfiguring their role and their understanding of what it means to be a teacher (González-Calvo 2025). As we discuss below, this theory not only explains the effects of stress or workload, but also offers insight into how teachers redefine their own identity in response to time fragmentation, virtualisation, and social-bureaucratic demands.

This scenario is further exacerbated by the increasing surveillance to which teachers are subjected. Constant supervision by educational administrations, along with pressure from families, reinforces a controlled environment that limits educators' professional autonomy (González-Calvo 2020b). The virtualisation of teaching, which has advanced significantly in recent years (Wang et al. 2023), has intensified this phenomenon by allowing for more exhaustive monitoring of teachers' work. This surveillance environment not only affects professional freedom but also creates a sense of mistrust that contributes to the deterioration of relationships between teachers and educational institutions, as well as between teachers and students.

In this context, our study aims to analyse and delve into how two teachers perceive and respond to the socio-cultural pressures surrounding teaching. The interpretation of the data, obtained through dialogical walking interviews in a natural setting, is guided by the theory of social acceleration (Rosa 2010, 2013). Our intention is, on the one hand, to provide a critical reading of how social acceleration and cultural changes in recent years have led to a deterioration in the teaching profession; on the other hand, we seek to engage in dialogue about the concerns and uncertainties regarding our future in education and attempt to find alternatives that offer the energy, passion, and commitment needed to move forward.

While we recognise that neoliberal policies—emphasising competition, standardisation, and accountability—have substantially shaped the teaching profession (e.g., Apple 2006;

Ball 2012; González-Calvo 2025; González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2018), we find Rosa's theory of social acceleration (Rosa 2009, 2010, 2013) particularly useful for elucidating how these structural pressures manifest in everyday experiences. From this perspective, neoliberal reforms may create the impetus for intensification, yet Rosa's framework clarifies the 'how': teachers face accelerated demands that erode their available time, amplify surveillance, and compromise their sense of professional identity. By merging these lines of thought, we suggest that neoliberalism helps explain the driving forces behind the profession's transformation, while social acceleration illuminates the concrete ways in which these forces materialise in teachers' daily lives.

3 | Methodology

3.1 | Participants

The participants in this study are two educators, each with over 15 years of professional teaching experience. M., a secondary school English teacher, passed her public education exams 20 years ago at the age of 26. Since then, she has taught in various towns and cities across Spain, and for the past eight academic years, she has held a permanent position at the same secondary school. From a young age, M. has felt a strong vocational calling to become a teacher. G., on the other hand, has taught across different educational stages over 16 years, including primary education, secondary education, and higher education. Currently, he holds a full-time position as a university lecturer, having previously worked as a primary school teacher for 12 academic years. G.'s reflections and opinions related to his professional career, as discussed in this article, are drawn from his experience in public primary education, rather than from his more recent role in higher education, to which he has fully dedicated himself since 2022. Unlike M., G. did not initially see teaching as his vocation, but he has found a sense of relief in university teaching, particularly in escaping the bureaucratic pressures he faced in primary education.

In the present study, the participants reflect on the various stages they have undergone throughout their careers, offering valuable insights into the development of their pedagogical thinking, their teaching practices, and their practical knowledge of education.

According to Vonk's (1988) model of professional development, both educators are in what can be considered the second phase of their careers. This stage is often characterised by a degree of disillusionment and pessimism, which may intensify in a subsequent phase of professional decline. Their extensive professional experience grants them a well-founded perspective on the teaching profession, providing them with a clear understanding of how the educational landscape has evolved over recent years. Furthermore, their status as tenured public employees afford them a level of job security, but also a sense of resignation, as they recognise that teaching will likely remain their primary occupation for at least another 20 years.

The participants gave written informed consent, and ethical approval was obtained for the study from the first author's

institution's Ethics Committee (code: PI 22-1995-NO HCUV), in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

3.2 | Duoethnography: A Collaborative and Critical Approach in Educational Research

Duoethnography is an emergent qualitative methodology that builds on autoethnography by fostering a dialogic exploration between two or more researchers who juxtapose their contrasting experiences on a specific theme or concept (Habibie and Sawyer 2024). This approach emphasises reflexivity and collaborative inquiry, using the researchers' own narratives as data to critically examine cultural, social, and political dynamics, thereby uncovering hidden narratives and questioning dominant norms (Creswell 2013). Unlike traditional autoethnography, duoethnography positions the researchers as the 'site' of investigation, enabling deeper analytical engagement (Habibie and Sawyer 2024; Sawyer and Norris 2013). In educational research, duoethnography offers significant potential for exploring teacher identity formation, analyzing pedagogical practices, and unpacking power dynamics within educational institutions (Creswell 2013; Habibie and Sawyer 2024). This method is particularly valuable for examining our relational and emotional complexities of teaching, as it foregrounds the interplay between systemic pressures and individual identity, offering deeper insight into our lived experiences as educators.

By incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, this methodology facilitates epistemic diversity and provides a platform for rethinking critical pedagogies (Habibie and Sawyer 2024; Thomas and Blanc 2021). Furthermore, its emphasis on dialogic and reflexive processes aligns well with efforts to decolonise educational practices and promote equity and social justice, making it a valuable tool for critically examining and reimagining educational experiences (Thomas and Blanc 2021).

3.3 | Rationale for Duo-Autoethnography

The choice of duo-autoethnography for this study stems from its ability to illuminate the intricate interplay between personal and professional dimensions of teaching. Unlike traditional qualitative methods, duo-autoethnography allows for a dialogic and reflexive approach, wherein researchers use their shared and contrasting experiences to critically examine broader socio-cultural dynamics. This methodology is particularly suitable for exploring the emotional and relational aspects of teaching, as it situates educators' lived experiences at the center of inquiry. Given the growing challenges in contemporary education, such as bureaucratic pressures and technological acceleration, duo-autoethnography provides a framework to capture the nuanced ways in which these external factors shape and transform teacher identity. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of this method fosters deeper introspection, enabling researchers to uncover hidden tensions and develop richer insights into the complexities of their professional lives. This approach not only enriches the data but also strengthens the validity of the findings by integrating multiple perspectives through dialogic engagement. However, we also recognise that duo-autoethnography, while useful and novel, requires a heightened awareness of its

potential limitations (Sawyer and Norris 2013). Because the researchers are both participants and analysts, the method demands continual reflexivity to minimise personal bias and over-identification with the data. Additionally, the close working relationship between researchers can reduce the range of interpretative distance, highlighting the need for transparency and critical friend review. By openly acknowledging these challenges, we seek to maintain a balanced, critically informed approach to our duo-autoethnographic practice.

3.4 | Data Collection

For this study, we employed a qualitative approach, which has become a valuable approach in educational research, particularly in the field of teacher education and professional development (e.g., González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2017; González-Calvo and Fernández-Balboa 2018). One of the significant aspects of this research methodology is the setting in which the dialogues took place. Walking in a natural environment fostered a relaxed and reflective atmosphere, enabling participants to engage deeply with their emotional and professional challenges. The act of walking allowed for a more fluid and natural conversation, as the participants were not confined to the rigidity of traditional interviews. Additionally, the natural surroundings provided a refuge, allowing emotional and cognitive distancing from daily educational pressures and fostering introspection (Scheller et al. 2024). This approach aligns with existing literature that suggests outdoor environments can reduce stress and promote mental clarity, which in turn supports more authentic and reflective dialogues (Brown and Durrheim 2009).

In order to explicitly address the dimension of identity transformation, we structured part of our questions around ‘how do you see yourself as a teacher today vs. at the start of your career?’, as well as ‘which moments have changed your way of understanding teaching?’, and ‘how have educational policies or bureaucratic demands affected your sense of being a teacher?’. Hence, the interviews not only sought to describe everyday situations but also to capture the emerging reconfigurations of teacher identity.

In our study, the duo-autoethnography methodology provided an appropriate framework for deepening our understanding of how professional identity has been shaped and constructed over the past few years, offering us the opportunity to better understand ourselves and our pedagogical practice. To achieve this, during the school holidays, we spent several days walking through a peaceful natural setting in northern Spain (see Figures 1 and 2), discussing our concerns, fears, and expectations regarding the teaching profession. This type of dialogical interaction allowed for a more natural and informal exchange, where the research-focused nature of the interviews took a back seat (Brown and Durrheim 2009).

Moreover, the fact that we are a couple presented several advantages when conducting these conversations. While it is true that at first, we felt somewhat apprehensive and self-conscious due to the presence of the recorder, the conversation began to flow naturally and spontaneously shortly after we started talking. Our close relationship facilitated open, honest, and spontaneous



FIGURE 1 | Image of the landscape during the interview in motion.



FIGURE 2 | Image of the landscape during the interview in motion.

communication, creating an ideal environment for exploring shared experiences.

The conversations took place between August 1 and 18, 2024. The starting point for the dialogue was our joint reading of the book *Stoner* (Williams 2012), which tells the story of a humble teacher whose career is marked by a search for meaning in what he does. All conversations lasted between 14 and 70 min, and were transcribed verbatim to enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1986). Questions were used to guide the dialogue, but the interviews were largely conversational in style. Questions relevant to this paper that were asked during the conversations included: ‘How do you think the teaching profession has

changed in recent years? Would you say that the excitement and passion for the profession have been sustained over time? How would you define your relationships with colleagues, students, and students' families? What are your expectations for the future of the profession?

3.5 | Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a thematic content analysis (Libarkin and Kurdziel 2002) and constant comparison (Miles and Huberman 1994) around questions such as 'what changes in your image of yourself as a teacher do you recognize in this excerpt?' or 'how have your beliefs about education been modified?'. This strategy allowed us to identify 'turning points' that illustrate processes of adaptation, crisis, or redefinition of the 'teacher self.'

Descriptive and pattern coding were used to analyse both within-case and cross-case patterns (Bøe et al. 2017). The authors conducted a thorough re-reading and reorganisation of the texts, adding annotations to highlight recurring phrases, ideas, and key concepts. A critical aspect of the analysis process is the role of the researchers themselves in analysing their own interview texts. While self-analysis can offer deep insights into personal experiences, it also risks narrowing the interpretative space, as the researchers may unconsciously project their own biases or emotional attachments to the data. To address this potential limitation, we implemented several strategies to enhance the rigour and transparency of the analysis. First, we engaged in regular self-reflection throughout the coding process, keeping a detailed record of our thoughts and potential biases.

Finally, the data were reviewed and the relationships between various concepts related to Rosa's theory were discussed, in alignment with the research objective.

Themes and categories were constructed from the data, which are presented in four main categories: (1) Bureaucracy stifles us: alienation from our actions; (2) the inability to manage everything: temporal alienation; (3) fragmented spaces and the loss of connection with students: spatial alienation and social alienation; and (4) exhaustion of the self: alienation from oneself and others.

It is important to highlight that, by conceiving identity as a complex, non-linear system under constant reformulation (Beijaard et al. 2005), our methodology sought not only to capture descriptive narratives but also the tensions, contradictions, and emerging redefinitions of the 'teacher self' in relation to external demands.

4 | Results and Discussion

Drawing on Rosa's Theory of Social Acceleration (Rosa 2009, 2010, 2013), we organised the data into four interconnected themes that illustrate the forms of alienation experienced by the teachers in our study: (1) Bureaucracy stifles us: Alienation from our actions; (2) The inability to manage everything: Temporal

alienation; (3) Fragmented spaces and the loss of connection with students: Spatial and social alienation; and (4) Exhaustion of the self: Alienation from oneself and others.

4.1 | Bureaucracy Stifles Us: Alienation From Our Actions

This theme aligns closely with Rosa's concept of technical acceleration (Rosa 2009, 2013), which emphasises how rapid technological advancements increase demands on individuals' time and attention. In education, this is reflected in the proliferation of digital tools and platforms, which, while intended to streamline teaching, often impose additional administrative tasks that distance teachers from their core pedagogical work. As evidenced in our data, teachers feel alienated from their core pedagogical mission, spending disproportionate time on administrative tasks that fragment their professional focus:

Bureaucracy sometimes reminds me of those leaf blowers people use. There's no sense in just blowing leaves from one place to another for no real reason; and it's funny how most of the time I see people using them, it's on really windy days. [...] I've read that those machines actually increase harmful pollutants and carcinogenic particles in the air. Yet, does the worker complain about having to do such a pointless and harmful job? Do we complain about it? No, we continue to carry out our duties obediently, without asking too many questions

(G., 11/08/2024).

The era of technology, paradoxically, 'drowns' teachers in administrative paperwork. This technical acceleration (Rosa 2013), while enabling educators to prepare teaching materials, primarily serves to create a work overload. At the same time, bureaucratic demands and educational policies are designed in offices far removed from the classroom, leading to an alienation of things (Rosa 2010) that creates a rift among teachers, who often lack clarity about the purpose of their work. In this sense, the focus remains on compliance rather than meaningful engagement, fostering what Rosa (2010) calls 'alienation from actions'.

We face numerous bureaucratic tasks every day that pull us away from what truly matters, which is preparing lessons and attending to students. [...] I'm not sure if much of what we do makes sense, which makes it easy to understand the psychological strain our profession suffers

(G., 12/08/2024).

I spend a lot of energy completing lesson plans, handling complaints, and filling out forms, because that's what the administration decides

(M., 12/08/2024).

The increasing administrative burden and imposed tasks divert educators from their true work, creating a disconnection

between their pedagogical values and the external demands they must meet (González-Calvo 2020b). This alienation not only affects teachers' motivation and commitment but also erodes their sense of professional self-fulfilment, leading them to question the essence of their educational role.

The growing bureaucratic burden exemplifies Rosa's concept of alienation from actions (Rosa 2013), where teachers are increasingly disconnected from the core of their professional mission. This alienation arises when their pedagogical work is overshadowed by administrative tasks that often lack a clear purpose. Teachers' reflections reveal that these tasks drain their energy and reduce their capacity to focus on meaningful teaching. As Rosa (2010) suggests, this kind of alienation erodes educators' sense of fulfilment, as their work becomes fragmented and depersonalised, leading to a gradual loss of motivation and commitment.

The increase in bureaucratization that I have experienced over the years is diminishing me, draining my energy and eliminating forces that should be dedicated to preparing my lessons and researching ways to improve my teaching practice
(G., August 15, 2024).

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), the increase in administrative burden leads to a decline in job satisfaction and an increase in emotional exhaustion among teachers. In this context, educators find themselves trapped in a cycle of tasks 'mostly without meaning or reason' (G., August 11, 2024), which results in a sense of alienation regarding their work:

Bureaucracy consumes us. [...] I enjoy teaching, I really do, but the bureaucracy suffocates me and, on many occasions, discourages me from wanting to continue
(M., August 15, 2024).

This feeling of being suffocated by bureaucracy is a clear indicator of burnout syndrome, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation at work (Zafra 2024). This can lead educators to question their commitment and motivation. Ultimately, the increasing bureaucratisation in the educational field not only represents a workload burden for teachers but also acts as a mechanism that dilutes the deeper meaning of their work, trapping them in a system that prioritises compliance over the very essence of education. In this sense, administrative demands quickly overtake teachers' time and energy, diverting them from the rewarding aspects of their profession and eroding their vocational drive.

4.2 | The Inability to Manage Everything: Temporal Alienation

This section exemplifies Rosa's notion of temporal acceleration (Rosa 2009, 2013), where the increasing speed and fragmentation of work tasks lead to a sense of desynchronisation. Teachers' reflections highlight the pressure to meet tight deadlines and

the encroachment of work on personal time, resulting in chronic stress and a diminished capacity for deep, reflective engagement with their teaching practice.

During the pandemic, we started working 24 h a day, seven days a week, in a somewhat sad effort to show people that we weren't neglecting our duties, that we were working even beyond our capabilities
(M., August 10, 2024).

The feeling of time scarcity and loss of control over it, accompanied by overloaded schedules, was one of the experiences during the pandemic (Bao 2020; González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2021). In an accelerated society, time becomes a scarce commodity, generating stress and a constant sense of urgency (Rosa 2013).

To accomplish everything, you have to dedicate an enormous amount of time; time that comes from your free time, time that should be spent on other things. [...] Most people think being a teacher is just about giving a few hours of classes; if they saw the amount of work invested behind the scenes, they would understand that it's a very demanding profession
(M., August 10, 2024).

We spend so much time on bureaucratic tasks that, in order to prepare lessons and attend to students, it is necessary to invest many hours outside of working hours, leaving you with the feeling that you are missing out on important aspects of your life, such as properly attending to your child
(G., August 10, 2024).

The dilution of temporal boundaries between work and personal life, which Rosa describes as desynchronisation (2010), leads to working beyond what is stipulated in working hours. This time, which should be personal but ends up being dedicated to work, exemplifies how social acceleration alienates teachers from their own time (Rosa 2010, 2013), resulting in mental and physical exhaustion that diminishes their passion and enthusiasm for their work (González-Calvo 2020b; Zafra 2024).

Rosa's concept of temporal alienation (Rosa 2009, 2010) highlights the increasing fragmentation of educators' time, which is often consumed by bureaucratic demands that extend beyond the confines of the school day. Teachers' narratives illustrate how they feel trapped in an endless cycle of tasks that intrude upon their personal lives, forcing them to work outside of contracted hours. This desynchronisation between professional and personal time contributes to chronic stress and diminishes their ability to engage in reflective and creative teaching. Such temporal alienation, as Rosa (2010, 2013) describes, not only leads to exhaustion but also exacerbates the disconnect between educators and their sense of purpose, further amplifying the emotional toll of the profession. At times, oases of deceleration

(Rosa 2010) serve as spaces that help highlight truly important aspects of life and assist in alleviating the demands and stress of the profession:

Many times, I think about how I'm losing precious time to be with my son. [...]. So, I decide to stop, to leave what I'm doing, and spend time with him; anything related to my profession I'll handle later

(G., August 13, 2024).

I often feel guilty about dedicating so much time to preparing lessons, grading, and writing reports, and so little time to Marcos. I try to compensate, to balance, and to fulfill my responsibilities as a mother

(M., August 13, 2024).

These findings demonstrate how the 'desynchronisation' of work and personal time (Rosa 2010, 2013) disrupts teachers' ability to fully engage with either domain, compounding the emotional strain that arises from continually 'running out of time'. In this sense, Rosa's idea of oases of deceleration becomes crucial: even small intentional pauses help reclaim a sense of agency and re-connect educators with their core values, offering temporary relief from the endless exigencies that redefine their time as a perpetual scarcity. In this sense, temporal alienation (Rosa 2010) is a problem that directly affects educators, who must fulfil their professional responsibilities in a climate of constant tension and demands. This leads to a certain feeling of 'overwhelm, stress, and exhaustion like I have never felt before' (M., August 13, 2024).

4.3 | Fragmented Spaces and the Loss of Connection With Students: Spatial Alienation and Social Alienation

Rosa's dimension of social acceleration (Rosa 2013) is evident here, as the intensification of societal expectations and the emphasis on measurable outcomes strain the relational dynamics between teachers, students, and families. The virtualisation of education, compounded by heightened surveillance, disrupts authentic connections and fosters a sense of isolation, further eroding the collaborative spirit essential to effective teaching:

When you are deprived of the opportunity to interact with another person naturally, things don't work. Human beings need contact and closeness. This is especially true for young people of these ages

(M., August 16, 2024).

In education, human interaction and close contact between students and teachers are essential. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a virtualisation of teaching that resulted in the loss of that interaction. Today, after the pandemic, it seems we are immersed in an increasing virtualisation of the teaching profession, where some schools have even experimented with the possibility of replacing teachers with artificial intelligence. However, face-to-face education involves a real and irreplaceable experience; in contrast, virtual teaching presents an appearance of 'being without being.' Furthermore, this virtuality

facilitates the modification and promotion of behaviours and attitudes that may not be educational or desirable:

It is difficult for me to imagine the possibility of educating in justice, friendship, solidarity, and critical thinking through the computer screen. [...]. It's complicated to collaborate in creating a more humane world using inhuman means

(G., August 17, 2024).

This alienation of space (Rosa 2010) is perceived by educators as a purely technical experience, where emotional and relational aspects have no place. When the educational space becomes a setting in which connections weaken, teachers feel isolated in their tasks, unable to connect with and motivate students:

Sometimes I feel like I'm speaking into a void. The eye contact is lost; for example, they don't look you in the eye. Everything becomes much more artificial

(M., August 16, 2024).

The virtualisation of education profoundly impacts the spatial dimension of teaching, as it replaces the embodied, situated experience of the classroom with a mediated, disembodied interaction (e.g., González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, et al. 2020; González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, et al. 2021; Varea and González-Calvo 2021). Rosa's (2010) concept of spatial alienation is evident here, as teachers lose the intimacy and familiarity that come from being physically present in the same space as their students. This lack of embodied presence not only diminishes the teacher's ability to communicate through non-verbal cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, but also weakens the sense of shared space that fosters mutual trust and engagement. As educators reflect on the challenges of teaching through screens, it becomes clear that the absence of a tangible, resonant environment hampers the depth and authenticity of pedagogical interactions.

A large part of what we try to communicate consists of non-verbal forms, such as gestures, body language, and facial expressions. [...] With the pandemic, we lost all of that, and now, in one way or another, we are struggling to regain that presence and closeness that we used to enjoy

(G., August 16, 2024).

Given that teachers are embodied subjects (Martínez Álvarez and González-Calvo 2016), we experience the world as spatially extended and situated in a place with which it is important to develop a sense of intimacy and familiarity (Rosa 2010). When that intimacy is absent, the teacher feels disconnected from the teaching space and their profession:

I have the feeling that I'm teaching against my students. It's as if I'm in class, intent on teaching them something they don't want to hear. [...] I feel out of place and I question what I'm doing there

(M., August 16, 2024).

The increasing fragmentation of teacher commitments, influenced by the constraints of time, physical space, and the proliferation of digital social networks, profoundly affects the quality of connections between educators and students. This division not only dilutes the efficacy of educational interactions but also impacts the formation of ‘human’ connections, which are foundational to the educational experience. In this sense, without corporeality present, the pedagogical link is attenuated and, from the teachers’ perspective, the capacity to educate, to agitate, to awaken a critical conscience is weakened (González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, et al. 2021; Varea and González-Calvo 2021).

These illustrations reveal how social acceleration also takes a spatial form (Rosa 2010) where educators lose the ‘shared presence’ needed to build trust and authentic relationships. Instead of cultivating a space rich in non-verbal and relational exchanges, the virtual setting often generates superficial contacts that lack ‘resonance’ (Rosa 2019).

4.4 | Exhaustion of the Self: Alienation From Oneself and Others

This theme vividly illustrates Rosa’s concept of self-alienation (Rosa 2010, 2019), where individuals become disconnected from their own sense of purpose due to relentless external pressures. The data reveal how the bureaucratisation and performance-driven demands of modern education strip teachers of their vocational passion, replacing it with a sense of monotony and exhaustion. As Rosa (2010) posits, this erosion of resonance with one’s work leads to emotional depletion and a weakened professional identity, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reforms that prioritise educators’ well-being and intrinsic motivation.

I have lost my enthusiasm for work, for teaching [...]. I would like to think that I will regain what I have lost, but I find it difficult

(M., August 8, 2024)

The acceleration of educational processes, the increase in bureaucracy, and the breakdown of close ties with the educational community discussed in previous sections generate an ‘exhaustion of the self’ (Rosa 2009, 2010), where teachers experience frustration, burnout, and a sense of alienation regarding their professional identity, as they are unable to meet their pedagogical expectations. In this state, educators face a crisis of identity and purpose:

At school, I felt like I wasn’t the teacher I wanted to be. I had the impression that I wasn’t contributing anything, that I wasn’t teaching, that time was slipping through my fingers and I couldn’t delve into anything [...]. I was losing my enthusiasm, gradually fading away. Now, at university, it seems that I have regained it

(G., August 6, 2024).

This quote highlights a loss of purpose in the teacher, which Rosa identifies as alienation from oneself (Rosa 2010). The ‘enthusiasm for work,’ symbolising pedagogical vocation, has gradually faded due to increasing external demands—primarily the rise in bureaucratic workload—and a lack of resonance in daily tasks. For educators, this internal alienation is devastating, leading to burnout (Han 2015; Zafra 2024) and a profound loss of meaning in their work. The reference to ‘fading away’ reflects the emotional exhaustion that accompanies this alienation, where teachers feel stripped of the passion and energy that once motivated them to teach:

If I had to describe the phase I’m in now, I would say it’s the ‘phase of exhaustion.’ Every year, when I start a new school year, it feels like Groundhog Day. The same thing again, with different students, but the same routine

(M., August 15, 2024).

The previous quote reflects a sense of emotional exhaustion, characterised by the cyclical repetition of tasks that lose their meaning or novelty. This phenomenon of constant repetition without a perception of significant change exemplifies self-alienation and disconnection from one’s actions (Rosa 2010). The teacher, feeling trapped in a repetitive cycle, experiences a disconnect with her work.

I believe that many times teachers feel demotivated in our work in the classrooms because we struggle to find meaning in what we do. The detachment from students, the endless paperwork, not knowing whether we are actually teaching anything...

(G., August 14, 2024).

The same sentiment is evident in this quote, where the feeling of uselessness or lack of purpose in work is linked to the alienation of one’s ‘professional self’, causing the educator to fail to perceive a significant impact from their actions. This type of alienation can intensify burnout syndrome, as the teacher feels disconnected from both their educational mission and their own professional values (Rosa 2010; Zafra 2017, 2024). In this discontent, relationships with students’ families play a significant role, as they have ‘changed considerably; now families constantly scrutinize our work’ (M., August 11, 2024). Whereas there was once trust from the educational community in teachers’ work, over time that trust has diminished, casting doubt on the educator’s professionalism. This distrust may be related to alienation from others (Rosa 2010), where educators feel the pressure of increasingly high expectations and a continual demand for accountability:

We have moved from a time when parents rarely came to discuss their children’s performance and did not visit schools, to an era where everything you do is subject to questioning by families

(M., August 11, 2024).

These visits (from families) are often to scrutinize the teacher’s work or to question what is happening in

the classroom, or to demand things that I believe they have no right to ask for

(G., August 11, 2024).

From the educators' perspective, part of the distrust from families toward teachers stems from the media and certain political parties that, in their eagerness to undermine public education, justify the most outrageous behaviours of teachers without considering the ethical and moral consequences of their positions:

There are politicians who claim that in public schools we are teaching pornography or encouraging children to practice bestiality, or similar absurdities. Certain media amplify these messages, and it is possible that some families internalize them [...]. So, it's normal for us to be constantly on edge, pressured to 'behave according to the rules,' as if that's not what we always do

(G., August 12, 2024).

Teachers are spoken to with little respect; it's all demands. The authority and professionalism that a teacher can have in the classroom are not recognized

(M., August 12, 2024).

Beyond the spatial dimension, virtualisation also disrupts the relational fabric of education, contributing to what Rosa (2019) describes as social alienation. The data highlight how the absence of face-to-face interactions, compounded by heightened surveillance and performance-driven demands, has eroded the relational dynamics between teachers, students, and families. Teachers feel increasingly scrutinised and mistrusted, leading to a breakdown in the collaborative spirit essential for effective education. This relational disconnection fosters a sense of isolation and exacerbates the emotional toll of the profession, further distancing educators from their sense of purpose and community. Alienation concerning others manifests when human relationships become instrumental and lack mutual trust or respect (Rosa 2010). In this context, the relationship between teachers and families reflects an emotional and social disconnection, where respect is replaced by an attitude of scrutiny and criticism, undermining teachers' enthusiasm and performance.

5 | Conclusions

This study provides a deep exploration of the emotional and professional challenges faced by educators in a context marked by bureaucratic pressures, technological acceleration, and shifting relational dynamics. Drawing on Rosa's theory of social acceleration (Rosa 2010; Rosa 2013), we have demonstrated how these systemic factors reshape teachers' experiences, leading to various forms of alienation: from their actions, their time, their professional space, and ultimately from themselves. This alienation undermines the vocational passion that initially drew many educators to the profession, leaving them struggling to navigate a system that often prioritises efficiency and performance metrics over meaningful teaching.

Our findings highlight the pervasive impact of bureaucratic overload, which fragments teachers' time and energy, distancing them from the core of their pedagogical mission (González-Calvo 2025; Zafra 2024). As Rosa (2010) posits, alienation from actions occurs when professional tasks become disconnected from their intrinsic purpose. The educators in our study expressed a profound sense of frustration, as their time was consumed by administrative tasks that offered little pedagogical value. This bureaucratic burden not only eroded their motivation but also perpetuated a sense of futility, reinforcing a perception that their professional efforts were undervalued.

Temporal alienation further exacerbates this disconnect, as teachers find themselves trapped in a relentless cycle of fragmented tasks that blur the boundaries between work and personal life. The educators described an incessant pace of work that deprived them of opportunities for reflective and creative engagement, echoing Rosa's concept of desynchronisation (Rosa 2010, 2013). This desynchronisation, intensified by the rapid adoption of new technologies, creates a work environment where teachers are continually adapting without sufficient time to critically evaluate or integrate these tools into their practice (Bao 2020; González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2021).

Spatial alienation, as evidenced in our findings, reflects the disruption of the embodied and situated experience of teaching due to increased virtualisation. Teachers lamented the loss of physical presence and its impact on building meaningful connections with students (e.g., González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, et al. 2020; González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, et al. 2021; Varea and González-Calvo 2021). This disembodiment, compounded by heightened surveillance, weakens the relational dynamics that are foundational to effective pedagogy, fostering isolation and diminishing trust within the educational community (Patrikakou 2015).

Finally, self-alienation emerges as a critical theme, capturing the emotional toll of these systemic pressures. Teachers reported feelings of exhaustion and a diminished sense of purpose, often questioning their professional identity and role. This aligns with Han's (2015) notion of the burnout society, where the constant drive for performance leads to emotional depletion and disengagement. The data reveal how the erosion of resonance with their work not only affects teachers' well-being but also threatens the sustainability of the teaching profession. However, it is essential to emphasise here that all the above has direct implications for the (re)construction of professional teacher identity. When we consider that professional identity is shaped by reflective processes and contextual interactions (González-Calvo 2025; González-Calvo and Fernández-Balboa 2018), we observe that social acceleration and bureaucracy not only exhaust teachers but also erode their narratives about who they are and what their mission entails (Beijaard et al. 2004; Beijaard et al. 2005). In other words, teacher professional learning is marked by 'episodes' of crisis and identity reconfiguration, leading to three potential pathways: (1) Resignation and maintenance of a fragmented identity; (2) Exit from the profession; or (3) The pursuit of resonance (Rosa 2019) and new forms of 'being a teacher' grounded in collaboration, reflexivity, and critical engagement with dominant models (González-Calvo 2025; González-Calvo and Fernández-Balboa 2018). This last option invites us to rethink educational practice as an act of resistance

and creation, where teachers participate in communities of practice, continuing professional development workshops, or self-care strategies that help them sustain or reinforce their vocational sense of purpose. However, we also recognise that our data and analysis do not encompass the full spectrum of teachers' experiences across different contexts. While our duo-autoethnographic approach reveals rich insights into daily pressures and alienation, it cannot account for all systemic and structural factors beyond our personal narratives. Additionally, our close engagement with the subject matter may raise questions about the transferability of these findings. Nonetheless, by adopting reflexive strategies, engaging a critical friend, and articulating the limits of our positionality, we aim to offer a compelling but necessarily partial view of alienation in teaching. These considerations regarding what we cannot uncover are as essential as our discussion of what we can, thereby addressing the validity and scope of our research.

Given these findings, it is imperative to rethink the structural and relational conditions within which educators operate. Systemic reforms must address the root causes of alienation by reducing bureaucratic burdens, fostering professional autonomy, and creating spaces for reflective practice. Furthermore, educational institutions must prioritise relational dynamics by cultivating environments that promote trust, mutual respect, and open communication between teachers, students, and families. These efforts can help restore the vocational passion that sustains educators, enabling them to reconnect with the transformative potential of their work.

Ultimately, this study calls for a collective reimagining of the teaching profession, one that values the human essence of education. Amid the challenges of social acceleration, we must strive to build a more humane educational system that empowers teachers to navigate change while preserving their sense of purpose and well-being. By fostering resonance within the educational community, we can create a space where educators feel supported, inspired, and equipped to face the complexities of their profession. From a practical standpoint, these conclusions call for continuous professional development programs that devote time to identity reflection, institutional measures to reduce administrative overload and prioritise pedagogical work, and the promotion of teacher communities that strengthen solidarity and the search for meaning (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). In this way, it will be possible to mitigate the effects of alienation and foster a professional learning process that reinforces—rather than weakens—the vocational identity of teachers.

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Ethics Statement

This work adheres to all relevant ethical guidelines. All data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Valladolid Ethics Committee as indicated in the manuscript (code: PI 22–1995-NO HCUV).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Endnotes

¹ In this article, when we use the term ‘teacher,’ we primarily refer to those working in public, Spanish educational institutions, mainly at the Primary and Secondary levels. We recognise, however, that the experiences described—particularly related to administrative burdens and professional alienation—may also resonate with teachers in other countries and school stages. Nevertheless, contextual differences (e.g., socioeconomic conditions, cultural expectations, and policy frameworks) can shape how these challenges manifest.

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