Chair of Psychiatry at Valencia University, López Ibor went to Germany to work under Lange, Rüdin, Bumke, and Goldstein, and later in France under Guillian and Alajuanine.

In 1932, he was elected to the Chair of Legal Medicine at the University of Santiago de Compostela. After failing to obtain the chair of Psychiatry in Madrid, López Ibor returned to Valencia as a psychiatrist. During the Spanish Civil War, he changed his allegiance from the Republican to the National side, and after a period in Pamplona, was elected to the Chair of Psychiatry at Salamanca. From there he transferred to Madrid, where he soon became a powerful figure and the leading light of official Spanish psychiatry. A generation of academics trained under him including two major figures, Carlos Castilla del Pino and Luis Martín Santos.

His 25 books and more than 500 articles cover a wide clinical compass, ranging from an early study on war neurosis, to sexual behaviour, psychoanalysis, corporal schema, and a theory of the neuroses. It is likely that the latter may prove to be his most original contribution as expressed in books such as La Angustia Vital and Las Timopatías Ansiosas, and his development of the concept of 'masked depression' which constituted the core of the 45th Maudsley Lecture which he delivered in 1970.

A somewhat controversial figure, López Ibor elicited from his psychiatric fellow countrymen both great adulation and criticism. His relationship with great men returning from the external exile, such as Gonzalo Lafuente, and with those trapped in the internal one, such as Bartolomé Llopis, was not always a happy one. Towards the end of his life Professor López Ibor was affected by Alzheimer's disease, knowledge of which condition he had helped to introduce in Spain.

Perhaps the best known Spanish psychiatrist of his generation, he received many honours including doctorates from seven foreign Universities, the Fellowship of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the Presidency of the World Psychiatric Association, of which his eldest son, Professor Juan José López Ibor Ajíno is currently the Secretary.

G. E. BERRIOS