



Emotional Intelligence As A Socio-Psychological Factor In The Formation Of Teachers' Professional Image

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ABSTRACT

This article examines emotional intelligence as a significant socio-psychological factor in the formation of teachers' professional image. The theoretical analysis is based on major approaches to emotional intelligence, including the ability model developed by P. Salovey and J.D. Mayer and subsequent conceptual developments in the field. Particular attention is given to the relationship between emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, interpersonal communication, professional self-regulation, and students' perception of the teacher. The article argues that emotional intelligence contributes to the formation of a coherent professional image by facilitating constructive communication, emotional stability, empathy, conflict management, and psychologically supportive pedagogical interaction.

KEYWORDS: Emotional intelligence, teacher, professional image, socio-psychological factors, emotional competence, empathy, self-regulation, communication, teacher-student interaction, professional development.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational environment places increasingly complex demands on the professional personality of the teacher. A teacher is expected not only to possess subject-specific and pedagogical knowledge but also to establish constructive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, regulate emotionally challenging situations, demonstrate psychological flexibility, and create a safe and supportive educational environment. Under these conditions, the professional image of the teacher acquires particular socio-psychological significance. The teacher's image is formed through the perception of numerous characteristics, including professional competence, communication style, appearance, behavior, emotional expression, interpersonal sensitivity, ethical standards, and attitudes toward students. Therefore, professional image cannot be reduced to external appearance or professional status. It represents a multidimensional psychological and social construct that emerges in the process of interaction between the teacher and the educational environment.

Emotional intelligence is particularly important within this structure. The concept has developed considerably since the work of Salovey and Mayer, who conceptualized emotional intelligence in terms of the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions. Later models expanded the construct and connected emotional competencies with interpersonal functioning, adaptation, and professional behavior. The relationship between emotional intelligence and teaching is especially significant because teaching is inherently an emotional activity. Teachers regularly encounter situations involving students' anxiety, frustration, conflict, motivation, disappointment, achievement, and interpersonal difficulties.



Consequently, the ability to recognize emotional states and regulate one's own emotional responses may influence both the quality of pedagogical interaction and the way the teacher is perceived by others. Research has increasingly examined emotional intelligence in relation to teacher well-being and professional functioning. A systematic review by Mérida-López and Extremera identified negative associations between emotional intelligence and teacher burnout across the studies reviewed, while also highlighting the diversity of theoretical approaches and measurement instruments used in this field.

Emotional intelligence occupies an important position at the intersection of psychology, social psychology, and educational psychology. One of the most influential approaches was proposed by P. Salovey and J.D. Mayer, who described emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence associated with the processing of emotional information. Within the ability approach, emotional intelligence includes several interconnected abilities:

1. perception and identification of emotions;
2. utilization of emotions in cognitive activity;
3. understanding and interpretation of emotions;
4. regulation of emotions in oneself and others.

These abilities have direct relevance to pedagogical activity. A teacher who accurately identifies a student's emotional state may adapt communication and instructional strategies accordingly. Similarly, the ability to understand one's own emotional reactions may prevent impulsive responses in difficult classroom situations.

Emotional intelligence should therefore not be understood simply as being "positive" or "friendly." From a psychological perspective, it involves a set of cognitive and regulatory abilities that enable individuals to process emotional information and use it appropriately in social situations.

The distinction between emotional intelligence and emotional expression is particularly important. A teacher may demonstrate calmness externally while experiencing significant internal tension. Conversely, a teacher with strong emotional awareness may consciously regulate emotional expression so that it remains appropriate to the educational situation.

Thus, emotional intelligence can be regarded as a psychological resource that supports adaptive professional behavior.

The teacher's professional image can be understood as an integrated perception of the teacher formed by students, parents, colleagues, educational administrators, and society. This perception is constructed through direct interaction as well as through indirect social information. The professional image has both external and internal dimensions. The external dimension includes appearance, clothing culture, speech, voice, gestures, posture, and manner of behavior. The internal dimension includes professional competence, values, motivation, emotional characteristics, ethical standards, communication skills, and personal maturity.

However, these dimensions should not be considered separately. The external behavior of the teacher is frequently interpreted through the internal characteristics attributed to the teacher by others. For example, calm speech may be interpreted as confidence; attentive listening may be interpreted as respect; controlled emotional expression may be associated with professional maturity; and empathetic communication may contribute to perceptions of trustworthiness. Consequently, emotional intelligence may serve as a connecting mechanism between the



teacher's internal psychological characteristics and their externally perceived professional image.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and professional image can be explained through several psychological mechanisms. Emotional awareness represents the ability to recognize and differentiate one's emotional states. For teachers, this ability is particularly important because pedagogical interaction may involve emotional tension. A teacher who recognizes irritation, anxiety, frustration, or emotional exhaustion is better positioned to regulate the corresponding behavioral response. Without emotional awareness, emotional reactions may become automatic and negatively affect communication.

For example, a teacher experiencing frustration may unintentionally use an excessively critical tone of voice. Students may interpret this behavior not simply as temporary irritation but as a stable personal characteristic. Repeated emotional reactions can consequently become part of the teacher's perceived professional image. Emotional awareness therefore contributes to consistency between internal experience and external behavior.

Self-regulation is one of the most important mechanisms connecting emotional intelligence with professional image. Teaching involves situations in which immediate emotional reactions may be inappropriate: disruptive student behavior, disagreement with parents, professional criticism, administrative pressure, examination periods, and classroom conflicts. Emotionally regulated behavior allows the teacher to maintain professional boundaries without suppressing emotions completely. The goal is not emotional absence but adaptive emotional management.

Empathy represents another important component of emotional intelligence. In the educational context, empathy involves the ability to understand students' emotional states and perspectives while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. An empathetic teacher is more likely to notice changes in students' emotional states, understand difficulties underlying certain behaviors, and respond to individual needs. Empathy also influences communication. When students perceive that a teacher listens attentively and takes their experiences seriously, interpersonal trust can develop. Recent systematic research on teachers' emotional competence indicates that emotionally competent teachers can contribute to supportive and psychologically safe learning environments. A 2026 systematic review reported consistent links between teachers' emotional competence—including emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity—and students' psychological and social well-being. This finding is relevant to professional image because students' perception of the teacher is partly shaped by the emotional climate created during interaction.

Communication is one of the principal mechanisms through which professional image is formed. The teacher's professional image is not established once and permanently. It develops dynamically through repeated interactions. Each lesson, discussion, feedback session, conflict, and informal interaction may contribute to students' perceptions of the teacher.

Emotional intelligence may influence communication through several pathways:

Perception of emotion → understanding → regulation → appropriate expression → constructive interaction → professional trust.

Teachers with developed emotional competencies may be better prepared to adapt communication to different students and situations. For example, the same instructional feedback may need to be expressed differently to a highly anxious student and to a highly

confident student. This does not mean that emotional intelligence automatically produces effective teaching. Professional competence, pedagogical knowledge, institutional conditions, workload, classroom composition, and organizational culture also influence teacher behavior. Therefore, emotional intelligence should be considered a contributing factor rather than a single determinant of professional image.

An important dimension of the teacher's professional image is emotional labor. Teachers are expected to regulate emotional expression according to professional and institutional expectations. For instance, teachers may need to remain patient when experiencing irritation, demonstrate encouragement when they are personally tired, and maintain respectful communication during conflict. However, continuous suppression of authentic emotions may have psychological costs. A meta-analytic review of 85 articles representing 33,248 teachers found that surface acting was positively associated with burnout-related components and negatively associated with teaching satisfaction, whereas the expression of naturally felt emotions showed associations in the opposite direction.

These findings are relevant to the concept of professional image. A positive professional image should not be understood as constant emotional performance. Instead, psychologically sustainable professional image formation requires a balance between emotional authenticity, professional self-regulation, and appropriate emotional expression. Emotional intelligence can potentially contribute to this balance by helping teachers recognize their emotional states and choose adaptive forms of expression. A systematic review of emotional intelligence and teacher burnout found generally negative associations between emotional intelligence and burnout dimensions, while also emphasizing that different EI models and measurement instruments produce heterogeneous findings. More recent evidence similarly identifies negative relationships between emotional intelligence and burnout and points to self-efficacy as one possible mechanism in this relationship. Thus, emotional intelligence may contribute to professional image indirectly by supporting teacher well-being and reducing emotionally maladaptive responses.

Table 1. Proposed structure of an emotional-intelligence development program

Training module	Main objective	Practical techniques	Expected professional outcome
Emotional awareness	Recognize personal emotions	Emotion diary, self-monitoring	Greater self-awareness
Self-regulation	Manage emotional reactions	Breathing, cognitive reappraisal, pause technique	Greater emotional stability
Empathy	Understand others' perspectives	Role-play, perspective-taking	More supportive communication
Communication	Improve interpersonal interaction	Active listening, feedback exercises	Greater communicative competence
Conflict management	Regulate difficult interactions	Case analysis, simulation	Constructive conflict resolution

Reflection	Improve professional behavior	Reflective diary, peer feedback	Professional self-development
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The implementation of such programs should be evidence-based and evaluated through appropriate psychological and educational measures rather than relying solely on subjective impressions.

The theoretical analysis demonstrates that emotional intelligence can be considered an important socio-psychological factor in the formation of teachers' professional image. Its importance is explained by the fact that teaching is simultaneously a cognitive, communicative, and emotional activity. The teacher's image is formed not only by professional knowledge but also by the manner in which this knowledge is communicated and embodied in interpersonal interaction. Emotional intelligence may influence this process by facilitating emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and constructive relationship management.

The relationship can therefore be represented as a chain: Emotional intelligence → emotional regulation and empathy → communication quality → interpersonal interaction → social perception → professional image.

The findings of the theoretical analysis have several implications for teacher education and professional development.

First, emotional intelligence should be included in psychological and pedagogical training programs for future teachers. Traditional professional training frequently emphasizes knowledge and instructional methodology, whereas emotional and interpersonal competencies may receive comparatively less attention.

Second, teacher professional-development programs should incorporate practical exercises rather than rely exclusively on theoretical information. Role-playing, reflective diaries, case analysis, emotional self-monitoring, peer feedback, and communication simulations may be useful approaches.

Third, teacher evaluation should avoid equating a positive professional image solely with external appearance or formal communication style. A comprehensive approach should consider professional competence, emotional regulation, interpersonal behavior, ethical standards, and reflective capacity.

Fourth, educational institutions should recognize that teachers' emotional functioning is influenced by organizational conditions. Emotional intelligence development cannot completely compensate for excessive workload, inadequate institutional support, chronic conflict, or unfavorable working conditions.

Finally, future empirical studies should examine the proposed relationships quantitatively. For example, researchers could investigate whether emotional intelligence predicts students' perceptions of teacher professionalism while controlling for teaching experience, academic qualification, age, workload, and educational level.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence represents an important socio-psychological resource in the formation of teachers' professional image. Its components—emotional awareness, understanding of emotions, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship management—are closely connected with

the interpersonal and professional behavior through which teachers are perceived by students, colleagues, and parents.

The teacher's professional image should be regarded as a multidimensional construct that integrates professional competence, communication, ethical behavior, emotional stability, appearance, interpersonal sensitivity, and reflective capacity. Within this structure, emotional intelligence can function as a psychological mechanism linking the teacher's internal emotional resources with observable professional behavior.

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