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DEVELOPING THE TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL SKILLS;
CONCEPTIONS, OPINIONS AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

The article deals with a complex topic in the area of interdisciplinary research, around the difficult issue of professionalization for the teaching career. Research on the development of the teacher's emotional skills are one of our strategic goals concerning the pupils', students' and teachers' transversal skills. In this investigative context, the article is based on previous research dealing with transversal skills, generally entrepreneurial and intercultural skills, as well as training self-management skills. The article is structured around two dimensions. The first section is devoted to the impact study and the conceptual analysis of key terms in the thematic field of the teacher's emotional profile. The second-dimension deals with the investigative approach, consisting of an empirical research around a sample of 130 subjects (students in Education Sciences, teaching staff, school managers, experts). The main investigation tool was the opinion survey including several categories of items: the need for educational policies and training programmes to focus on the teacher's emotional component; educational and curricular strategies on teacher training programmes from the perspective of the emotional profile; managerial and personal strategies for the development of emotional skills. The outcomes confirm: a) a high degree of awareness on the rethinking of teacher training programmes from the perspective of the development of emotional skills; b) the subjects' involvement in strategies focused on self-knowledge, self-control, capitalization of their own emotions and the pupils' emotions. These results confirm the research hypotheses and will be capitalized in further investigations regarding the development of emotional skills.

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Keywords: Transversal skills, the teacher's emotional skills, emotional profile, emotional learning, emotional skills development strategies.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the development and assertion of transversal skills is a strategic goal of teaching staff training policies and programmes, as well as a focus in the area of educational research. A diachronic and synchronic analysis reveals multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in this field, resulting from the cross-disciplinary and multifunctional nature of these categories of competences. Thus, educational management, teaching career management, professional training curriculum management, sociology and psychology of education, intercultural education, personality psychology, social pedagogy provide the theoretical baselines for the axiological, conceptual and methodological framework of the issue at stake.

The primary elements of the emotional profile are skills developed in situations of social interaction (Saarni, 2000) whose emotional dimension is capitalized in several contexts, with a view to enhancing emotional experience and the capacity to manage and use it. In our opinion, the emotional profile of the teacher is configured around categories of emotional skills at the borderline with other types of transversal skills: social skills, communication skills, intercultural skills (Bunăiașu, 2018, p. 67).

The correlated issues of emotional intelligence and emotional competence have some shared meanings and psycho-pedagogical features, as well as distinctive notes. Their suitable comprehension from a terminological, structural and functional point of view provides the conceptual and methodological framework of the impact study and further investigation in the area of the teacher's emotional competence.

In the field of teaching career, *emotional intelligence* details and contextualizes generic components and characteristics – self-control, self-knowledge, social conscience and social interaction management (Goleman, 2001). Metacognition, empathy and educational leadership are basic capacities determining the teacher's emotional intelligence. In this context, emotional intelligence refers to the adequate and multilateral determination, analysis and interpretation of the affective dimensions of the educational process, as well as to the abilities to create the suitable affective frame for instructive-educative activities. The teacher's emotional intelligence is shown by the variables of the affective frame, determined by the intensity of the affective resonance of teaching and learning processes.

The emotional competence integrates the components of emotional intelligence, which are structured in a system of relations of cognitive variables, skills, values and professional attitudes, with a view to “facilitating educational and social performance and personal and professional development, by adequately managing the emotions, feelings and situations that generated them” (Bunăiașu, 2018, p. 68). Basic capacities are those related to emotional intelligence (metacognitive, empathic, leadership capacities), along with cognitive and axiological elements:

- an enhanced knowledge system for the capitalization of emotions and feelings in the educational process;
- intellectual capacities for processing, integrating and extrapolating knowledge;
- the awareness, capitalization and responsible involvement as a facilitator of the affective frame and emotional learning.

A high degree of emotional intelligence and a strong development of the teachers' emotional competences may be seen in various ways: a) the qualitative analysis of the teachers' professional behaviours and attitudes, favouring the affective basis of teaching and emotional learning (deployment of

educational styles, of affective and communication strategies, leadership and coaching behaviours); b) impact studies on professional performance regarding the affective dimension of the educational process; c) tests for the assessment of the emotional coefficient (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 2001).

2. Problem Statement

The basic presupposition of our conceptions and research on the development of the teachers' transversal skills emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach of the professionalization system and process for the teaching career, for an integrated, balanced and consistent approach of professional and transversal skills, of professional and social values of curricular training and self-management strategies. Our previous research has shown various subfields of transversal skills, approached conceptually in this paradigm, as well as methodological frames and tools for development, assertion and contextualization. To this purpose, we outline:

- the management skills of the teaching career, representing a “workable and transferable range of procedural knowledge and metaknowledge, skills, values and professional attitudes required for professional development, by successfully drawing up and deploying projects and programmes for the improvement/enhancement/extension of professional training”, integrating “management skills asserted through self-management of personal and professional development and a range of values determining the teachers' responsible involvement in continuous training” (Bunăiașu, 2013);
- the teachers' entrepreneurial skills, developed through academic subjects and training programmes, strategies specific to entrepreneurial education and training programmes, project management and metacognitive strategies (Bunăiașu, 2014; Joița, 2006; Sava, 2007; Verzuh, 2003; Wilson & Lowry, 2000);
- intercultural skills, analysed in terms of conceptual frames, of professional profile structures, of development through curricular strategies and training programmes, of their assessment or thematic integration in education for sustainable development and international solidarity (Bunăiașu & Strungă, 2016; Bunăiașu & Stoian, 2017; Tilea, Morin, & Duță, 2019; Teodorescu, 2017).

The need and opportunity of an impact study on the development of the teachers' emotional skills are supported by various categories of arguments, regarding:

- the classification of the topic among the priorities of postmodern pedagogy, capitalizing the subjective dimension of the educable/trainable, in the issues of system reform and teacher training processes;
- developing wide-encompassing research, by means of comprehensive scientific studies and results of other research, confirming the importance of asserting emotional intelligence and emotional skills in educational activities, in the pupils' personal development;
- integrating investigation in our works regarding the development of the teachers' transversal skills;

- ensuring continuity and deepening the issue of the teachers' emotional skills, as the impact study is conceptually supported by the contributions in the article *The conceptual framework of the emotional competences of the teacher – a comprehensive approach* (Bunăiașu, 2018);
- capitalizing the employed methodology and the results of the impact study for: a) outlining a basis of opinions, representations and conceptions; b) subsequently developing tools for assessing the impact of the teacher's emotional profile; c) designing an experimental approach regarding the development of the teachers' emotional skills;
- the impact of the information and communication technologies on the development of emotional intelligence and competences, and particularly the use of social networks (Pera, 2018) and online learning communities.

These results of our previous research and the presented arguments were the cognitive, methodological and motivational support in complex research in the field of the teacher's emotional competence, of which the hereby impact study is a first investigative research. These consideration are also based on the recommendations of previous studies in the field of education sciences and psychology

3. Research Questions

After outlining the conceptual framework, three fundamental questions were drawn up regarding the impact study: a) What is the degree of awareness regarding the importance of emotional skills in the desirable professional profile for the teaching career?; b) What categories of questions generate relevant and complex answers for the researched topic?; c) What kind of perceptions and opinions may be deployed and capitalized for the pursuit of research, consisting of the further design of an experimental approach?

The research hypotheses have been developed according to recent studies on perationalization models (Orțan, 2013). The following research hypotheses were drawn up:

- 1) A high level of psycho-pedagogical culture in the field of emotional intelligence/competence and professional experience results in a high degree of awareness on rethinking teacher training programmes.
- 2) The relevance and efficiency of teacher training strategies and programmes, from the perspective of the development of emotional competence, are determined by the conceptual support, by the suitability for current professionalization directions and by the prevalence of experiential learning situations.

4. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to deploy a platform of opinions, perceptions and conceptions regarding the development and capitalization of the teachers' emotional skills, lying at the basis of the design of a subsequent experimental approach.

The specifically derived purposes are:

1. Analysing the awareness and motivational support for the subjects' involvement in the research and development of the topic.
2. Testing the subjects' opinions and conceptions regarding the strategies and programmes for the development of the teachers' emotional skills.

3. Systematizing relevant operationalizable results that may be capitalized in further expected research.

5. Research Methods

5.1. The sample

The sample of subjects, was selected by means of a combined technique, through rational selection and layered randomization. Relevance and representativeness were ensured by distributing subjects across professional categories. Thus, 130 subjects were selected, as follows: 60 students from Bachelor and Master's programmes in Educational Sciences of the University of Craiova; 40 teaching staff from pre-university education; 20 school managers; 10 experts, university teachers in the field of Social Sciences.

5.2. Investigation methods and tools

Opinion surveys are the primary investigation method used in research. The item categories of the survey also represent independent variables of the research: a) the need for educational policies and training programmes to focus on the emotional dimension of the professional competence profile (items 1-4); b) educational and curricular strategies on the development and implementation of teacher training programmes, from the perspective of the emotional profile (items 5-9); c) managerial and personal strategies for the development of the teachers' emotional skills (items 10-12); d) further strategic directions regarding the research of the topic and the optimization of the professionalization of the teaching career, from the perspective of emotional skills (data collected from focus group meetings).

The data collected pursuant to the administration of the opinion survey were supported by the data obtained pursuant to focus group meetings with representatives of each subject category. The analysis of relevant answers from focus groups outlined arguments of the subjects' opinions, various perceptions and representations, personal reflections, problematic situations of the teaching activity and of the teacher training system/process.

The obtained data was analysed by means of: a) recording and statistical processing of the subjects' favourable answers (by adding "to a high extent"/"very high extent" answers or "agree/totally agree" answers, or answers quantified as 4, 5) grouped across research variables; b) our interpretations regarding the subjects' answers (from the survey and focus groups), reported to factors explaining certain options of the subjects.

6. Findings

The systematization and analysis of relevant data, through the mentioned methods, outline the following perceptions, opinions and conceptions of the subjects:

- Criteria regarding the variable educational policies and training programmes on the emotional dimension of the professional competence profile (see Table 01): 1) rethinking the initial teacher training system, by assigning a higher weight to transversal skills in the psycho-pedagogical training curriculum; 2) developing a national framework programme for the development of the teachers' curricular integration competence; 3) developing, implementing and monitoring training programmes focused on the teacher's emotional profile.

Table 01. The variable Focus of educational policies and training programmes on the emotional dimension of the professional competence profile

Groups	Criterion no.1	Criterion no.2	Criterion no.3
Students	78,33%	73,33%	78,33%
Pre-university teachers	72,5%	48,33%	77,50%
School managers	70%	65%	75%
Experts	80%	90%	80%

The statistical analysis of the results shows a high awareness on the need for initial and continuous training policies to be focused on the development of transversal skills in general and emotional skills in particular (see Table 02). The comparative analysis of percent data shows significant differences between pre-university teachers on the one hand and experts and students on the other hand, regarding the criterion *developing a national framework programme for the development of the teachers' curricular integration competence*. The fact that this criterion scored low among pre-university teachers shows their attachment to the scientific field of their subject, especially among lower and upper secondary teachers. Students, experts and school managers assign a high priority to curricular integration, as a principle for the design of professional training programmes and development of the teachers' and pupils' transversal skills.

Table 02. The statistical significance of percent differences regarding the criterion Developing a national framework programme for the development of the teachers' curricular integration competence

Groups	T value	Significance
Students- Pre-university teachers	2.12	p=0.05
School managers - Pre-university teachers	1.25	NS
Experts- Pre-university teachers	3.37	p<0.01

- The criteria regarding the variable Educational and curricular strategies for the development and implementation of teacher training programmes from the perspective of the emotional profile: 1) Introducing specific subjects/modules (Table 03): 1.1 Personal development strategies; 1.2 Emotional intelligence/competence; 1.3 Teaching career management; 1.4 Stress management; 2) Prevalence of experiential learning situations; 3) The use of suitable educational strategies and methodologies for emotional learning and development: 3.1 Affective-motivational strategies; 3.2 Mentoring and coaching strategies and techniques; 3.3 Specific strategies for constructivist training; 3.4 Educational interaction methods; 3.5 Efficient communication methods and techniques; 3.6 Case study.

Table 03. The variable Educational and curricular strategies for the development and implementation of teacher training programmes from the perspective of the emotional profile

Criterion	Students	Pre-university teachers	School managers	Experts
1. Personal development strategies	73,33%	67,5%	80%	80%
2. Emotional intelligence/ competence	81,66%	77,5%	85%	90%
1.3. Teaching career management	61,66%	57,5%	75%	80%
1.4. Stress management	73,33%	77,5%	75%	80%
2. Experiential learning	81,66%	77,5%	80%	90%
3.1. Affective-motivational strategies	85%	72,5%	65%	70%
3.2. Mentoring and coaching strategies and techniques	81,66%	77,5%	85%	90%
3.3. Specific strategies for constructivist training	73,33%	72,5%	80%	80%
3.4. Interactive methods	81,66%	82,5%	85%	70%
3.5. Efficient communication methods and techniques	85%	87,5%	80%	80%
3.6. Case study	61,66%	57,5%	70%	70%

- The criteria for the variable Managerial and personal strategies for the development of the teachers' emotional skills (Table 04): 1) The introduction of objectives and strategic directions for developing the emotional skills of teaching staff in the management projects of schools or continuous training programme providers; 2) The organization of virtual social and emotional learning environments (Strungă & Martin, 2012); 3) Counselling students and teachers for the design of personal and professional development projects; 4) Consultancy and monitoring activities in the use of metacognitive strategies in emotional learning (self-knowledge, emotional self-control, suitable understanding of one's own emotions and feelings, self-management of emotional states, positive capitalization of the latter in personal development).

Table 04. The variable Managerial and personal strategies for the development of the teachers' emotional skills

Groups	Criterion no.1	Criterion no.2	Criterion no.3	Criterion no.4
Students	53,33%	85%	73,33%	78,33%
Pre-university teachers	47,5%	82,5%	62,5%	52,5%
School managers	65%	80%	65%	55%
Experts	60%	90%	70%	80%

The analysis of percent data shows the subjects' choice of educational, curricular and management strategies supported by recent evolutions in educational theory and professional training methodology. It should be seen that a single significant difference was seen between the subject categories for the last two

variables, for the criterion regarding metacognitive strategies in emotional learning (teaching staff and school managers assigned more than 50% here as well). The analysis of this criterion confirms a previous study (Bunăiașu, 2013), where a significant difference was seen for metacognitive strategies in teacher training, that were assigned a lower priority by the same categories and which is due, in our opinion, to the degree of current knowledge on relevant psycho-pedagogical culture and the low experience in the use of metacognitive strategies.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of results and of the subjects' involvement in research primarily shows the awareness of the importance of emotional skills in the professional profile of teaching staff, the understanding of the issues and the involvement in the self-training process from this perspective. Furthermore, the subjects' attachment to strategies and programmes focusing on postmodern orientations in the professional training of teaching staff in general and in the development of the emotional profile in particular, is emphasized: the full development of the competence profile, through a balance between the specialized component and the transversal dimension; pedagogical constructivism; learning types based on interactivity, metacognition, the use of virtual environments; emotional learning, collaborative learning, experiential learning.

In relation to these results, it may be said that the two particular hypotheses were partially confirmed. Thus, the level of psycho-pedagogical culture in the field of emotional intelligence/competence and professional experience determines favourable and strategic options regarding teacher training programmes. Specific strategies and programmes are relevant, efficient and of high quality, through consistent conceptual support and methodological approaches based on emotional learning, through the capitalization of positive experiences in interactive, constructivist contexts, of mentoring and coaching). For the full confirmation of these hypotheses, we intend to apply the survey to a larger sample of subjects, representative for the South-West Oltenia region. Thus, additional studies also need to focus on the relationship between the development of emotional intelligence and competences and the employment of graduates in the field of education sciences (Orșan, 2015). Furthermore, we intend to structure a consistent database, that may be operationalized and capitalized in further research, to be focused on the validation of methodological tools and the experimental testing of a framework curricular programme for developing the teachers' emotional skills.

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