

## **IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHER IN CONTEMPORARY BULGARIAN SCHOOL**

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**Abstract:** This report presents an analysis of the results of an empirical study on the current level of the social and emotional skills of teachers who carry out their professional pedagogical activities in the system of pre-school and school education in Bulgaria. The survey was conducted in May and June 2017 in two administrative districts - Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil. The research was carried out in the framework of a scientific research project: "Importance of the social and emotional skills for the successful professional realization of the teacher". Current levels of the components of the emotional intelligence of teachers in different educational stages and grades are established. Special attention is paid to such important professional-personality characteristics as: self-control, self-knowledge, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The importance of emotional intelligence for the professional realization of the teacher is revealed. The problem of the interrelationship between socio-emotional skills and the professional realization of teachers is addressed in the context of the idea of lifelong learning. Current reforms in the field of education require a major investment in order to raise the skills of today's pedagogical specialists. Appropriate policies and practical solutions are needed to develop professional skills and personal qualities of teachers, in this way increasing their competitiveness on the labor market.

**Keywords:** socio-emotional skills, emotional intelligence, self-control, self-knowledge, motivation, empathy and social skills, teacher's professional profile, professional development of the teacher.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bulgarian society at its current stage of development requires the educational system to provide conditions for the training of highly qualified specialists for the different spheres of human activity. An important part of these conditions - conditions for a quality education process in Bulgarian schools, constitute staff resources. Achieving high professionalism in the preparation and qualification of current and future teachers is an indisputable task of higher education institutions that prepare staff for pre-school and school education. In the improvement of professional competencies of pedagogical specialists key role is played by functioning in Bulgaria department and centers for qualification of teachers. Long-standing qualification activity is also carried out by the Center for Continuing Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the South-West University "Neofit Rilski". The Continuing Education Center continuously renews its activity in terms of content and technology, and brings its activity in line with the requirements of the professional pedagogical community as well as the needs of the labor market. Supporting the qualification activity in this structural unit of the Faculty of Pedagogy there are also researches carried out on problems related to the professional work of the teacher. During the present year of 2017, the efforts of a team of lecturers, PhD students and students at the Faculty of Pedagogy have been aimed at studying the importance of the teacher's socio-emotional skills for his own professional development. One of the main tasks of education is related to the need to develop cognitive, social-emotional and technical skills for successful realization on the labor market. Given the current socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria, formal education ceases to be the sole criterion for successful professional realization of individuals. The need for specific social and emotional, so-called "soft" skills in the personal and professional image of the teacher and other pedagogical specialists is evident. The research interest in the analysis and assessment of the current level of formation of socio-emotional skills in Bulgarian teachers is fully justified. This allows the relationship between the abovementioned skills and the successful professional realization of the pedagogical specialists to be revealed. The level of emotional intelligence occupies an important place in the overall professional-personal profile of the modern teacher. The aspirations of the teacher towards improving professional and personal qualities are closely related to the process of building a culture of lifelong learning.

The interest in the problem on formation and development of the socio-emotional skills of pedagogical specialists is also provoked by the results of the National Panel Study of the Bulgarian Longitudinal Inclusive Society (BLISS) conducted by the World Bank in cooperation with the Open Society Institute - Sofia in 2013. A report by the World Bank - "Skills for work in Bulgaria: the relationship between cognitive and socioemotional

skills and labor market outcomes"<sup>3</sup>, presents data collected by a national representative survey on the cognitive and socio-emotional skills of the working age population. The analysis of the results of the empirical study shows that at the current stage of development of society we need to focus our attention on the assessment of the skills held by people of working age, regardless of their level of education. For the Bulgarian labor market the information on the level of formation of cognitive and socio-emotional skills is very important. These skills are not reflected in diplomas, but successful job realization depends to a great extent on them. The question of so-called "soft" skills is particularly relevant for the training and qualification of the modern teacher. In the context of the idea of lifelong learning, the problem of the interrelationship between social-emotional skills and the workforce realization of teachers further enhances their significance. Reforms in the field of education today require a serious investment to improve the skills of current and future pedagogical specialists. Appropriate policies and practical solutions are needed to develop professional skills and personal qualities of teachers in order for them to be competitive on the labor market.

## 2. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS OF THE TEACHER

Socio-emotional skills are an important part of the overall professional shape of the teacher. "Soft" skills are a manifestation of the person's emotional intelligence and are in full synchronicity with the teacher's most frequently mentioned professional and personal qualities, namely pedagogical observability, pedagogical sociability, pedagogical creativity and emotional sustainability. Emotional intelligence can be defined as "a complexity of behaviors, abilities (or competencies), beliefs and values that help individuals successfully realize their vision and mission if they are given this choice"<sup>4</sup>. Specialized literature emphasizes on the importance of intrapersonal intelligence, which relates to the personality skills of determining its own moods, feelings and other mental states and their influence on behavior and self-motivation. Special attention is paid to interpersonal or social intelligence, defined as "recognizing emotions in others, using this information as a guide to behavior, and building and maintaining relationships"<sup>5</sup>. In the professional activity of the teacher, particularly valuable manifestations of emotional intelligence are: emotional receptivity, emotional responsiveness and emotional assessment. The effectiveness of the pedagogical process depends to a great extent on the combination of the abovementioned qualitative characteristics and their constructive combination in the teacher's personal profile. In the overall notion of emotional intelligence, according to R. Wood and H. Tolly, there are five areas of competence: 1) self-control – ability to manage and control one's own emotional state; 2) self-knowledge – knowledge of one's own emotions and essence of personality; 3) motivation – striving of achieving one's goals though guiding one's emotions; 4) empathy – knowing and recognizing emotions of others; 5) social skills – influence on others and the attitude towards them<sup>6</sup>. M. Gituni sets realization and identification of emotions in the basis of emotional intelligence. Equally important is the management of emotions related to the ability of a person to display flexibility and adaptability in a variety of situations. According to M. Gituni, self-motivation allows the person, the professional to direct his efforts for achieving goals and solving tasks, with a focus on the successful realization of the personality. Co-experiencing of other's emotions and the ability to maintain good relationships with others in author's view are also seen as important elements of emotional intelligence. Mastering interpersonal relationships involves "managing the emotions of others according to one's own motivations and emotions"<sup>7</sup>.

Special attention in the study of the Center for Continuing Education at the South-Western University "Neofit Rilski", results of which are presented in this report, is given to the five components of emotional intelligence - self-control, self-knowledge, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The overall analysis of the data obtained in the course of the empirical study made it possible to consider and interpret in a new way the problem of teachers training and qualification in the modern educational system.

Self-knowledge is closely related to the processes of self-reflection and reflection in teacher's professional pedagogical work. For the educator, the ability to identify his own feelings and emotions is extremely important. Being aware of real emotions creates confidence in the ability to exercise control over one's own emotional world and on relationships with others. To the teacher, this is of particular importance, as it is directly related to his ability to organize his / her communication with other pedagogical subjects. The "teacher-student" interaction is so much more active and more effective as the level of awareness of the emotional status of the participants in the

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<sup>3</sup> Levin, V. and others. World Bank Report. "Skills for work in Bulgaria: the relationship between cognitive and socioemotional skills and labor market outcomes ", 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Marlevede, P., Bridu, D., Vandam, R. 7 steps to emotional intelligence, Sofia, 2005, p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Marlevede, P., Bridu, D., Vandam, R. 7 steps to emotional intelligence, Sofia, 2005, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, R., Tolly, H. Professional tests on emotional intelligence, Sofia, 2003, p.14.

<sup>7</sup> Gituni, M. Emotional Intelligence, Sofia, 2003, p.44.

pedagogical process is higher. Self-knowledge, self-analysis, self-reflection are all part of the deliberate management of the educational process and a condition for its effectiveness. Self-knowledge is also connected to the self-esteem that the professional feels and the satisfaction from the performed activities. The knowledge that a person acquires for himself also gives him confidence to assert the principles in his private life and profession. The true perception of one's own feelings and emotions is a beneficial factor for the authenticity of the teacher's relationship with other pedagogical subjects, with parents and the broad social environment. Self-knowledge paves the way to acquainting with others, to conforming with their peculiarities, to accept their differences.

Self-control is another important component of emotional intelligence. Controlling one's own emotional state is a prerequisite for the emotional sustainability and balance in the behavior of the educator during the implementation of the educational process. The teacher is expected to exhibit the necessary emotional stability at any given moment of the pedagogical interaction with his students and colleagues. Teacher's self-control is at the heart of the emotional-psychic comfort of students. "The ability to control emotions and their adequacy is an ability built on our self-awareness."<sup>8</sup> With this statement, D. Golman clearly emphasizes the relationship and interdependence between self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-control. The connection between these characteristics in the behavior of a professional pedagogue is particularly evident. On the one hand, they find a clear manifestation in the behavioral model that the teacher demonstrates, and on the other hand they affect the behavior of his students.

Empathy as a component of the emotional intelligence displayed by the teacher in the pedagogical process is another valuable personal and professional characteristic. Empathy is related to a highly developed personal sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal messages of others. This sensitivity is usually accompanied by an emotional response expressed in empathy, co-experience. In professional pedagogical communication empathy is a kind of a catalyst for the success of the educational process. The connection of empathy with one of the components of emotional intelligence - self-awareness, which has been discussed above, must be emphasized. Through the knowledge of oneself as a person and a professional, the teacher finds a way to others and increases his sensitivity to their emotions and experiences.

An extremely valuable component of a pedagogue's emotional intelligence is motivation, which is naturally interrelated with self-control and self-knowledge. The internal motivation of the teacher determines his focus on achieving important goals in the professional pedagogical activity. We associate motivation also with the dedication in the profession of the teacher, the selfless commitment of our own work to higher educational goals in support of the development of the growing up individual. The motivation of the teacher is also associated with the manifestations of determination, confidence and optimism in the pedagogical interaction, which undoubtedly favors the success of the educational process.

All of the areas of competence discussed above are closely related and interdependent with yet another valuable manifestation of emotional intelligence, namely - social skills. They allow the teacher to actively interact with learners, influence their behavior and stimulate their cognitive activity. The level of formation of social skills of the teacher is a prerequisite for effective pedagogical communication. This type of skills also implies a high degree of empathy and self-control in the pedagogical interactions of the teacher.

### **3. LEVELS OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS OF THE TEACHER – EMPIRICAL DIMENSIONS**

In carrying out the activities within the project "Importance of the socio-emotional skills for the successful professional realization of the teacher" a team from the Center for Continuing Education at the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" conducted a survey in two administrative districts of Bulgaria - Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil. The survey was conducted in May and June of 2017. It included different groups of respondents - teachers in pre-school and school education system, working in different stages and educational degrees, and students in the first and fourth year of different pedagogical specialties at the Faculty of Pedagogy, where teachers are being trained. The study was carried out in partnership with the Regional Education Directorates in Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil. The total number of teachers included in the survey was 137, of which 120 women and 17 men. The relative share of men is a clear evidence of the categorical feminisation of the teaching profession. The majority of the respondents - 107, possess a master's degree, 30 have a Bachelor's degree. 197 students from Primary School Pedagogy and Foreign Language, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy and Foreign Language, and Physical Education and Sport took part in the survey, of which 161 women and 36 men.

Only parts of the results of the undertaken survey and certain aspects of the interpretation of the levels of socio-emotional skills of pedagogical specialists in the pre-school and school education are presented in this report.

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<sup>8</sup> Golman, D. Emotional Intelligence, 2000, p.86.

A comparative analysis of the established levels of socio-emotional skills of two groups of people – currently active teachers and students who are getting ready to perform professional pedagogical activities is conducted.

The aim of the survey is to identify the current state of the problem of emotional integrity of the contemporary teacher and to reveal the interrelation between the socio-emotional skills and the realization of the pedagogical specialists on the labor market. For the study of emotional intelligence, a standardized test<sup>9</sup> was used to measure the levels of five components - self-control, self-knowledge, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The test included five parts, each of which made it possible to take into account the level of tracked qualitative professional and personal characteristics. The total number of questions in the test was thirty. The study of each of the five components of emotional intelligence was allocated into six questions each. The research tasks related to the five parts of the test are as follows: 1) establishing the level of self-control performed by the teacher with respect to own feelings and emotions; 2) taking into account the level of the process of self-knowledge, self-analysis, and self-reflection in pre-school and primary school teachers; 3) the levels of motivation in teachers to effectively target the intellectual potential and the emotional spark to achieving pedagogical goals that are relevant to the personality of the professional; 4) establishing the level of empathy, sympathy, co-experiencing feelings and emotions of others; 5) determining the level of formation of social skills in the surveyed teachers that enable them to carry out active and effective pedagogical interaction.

The results of the study revealed high levels of one of the important components of emotional intelligence - "self-control" in 70% of teachers, average levels in 21%, and only 9% of the respondents had low levels. In 61% of students, the levels of skills to control their own feelings and emotions show a high degree of formation. In 24% of the prospective teachers surveyed, the level of self-control is average and in 15% of them is low. In both groups of respondents predominant are those who have highly developed skills to control their own feelings and emotions. This undoubtedly demonstrates the existence of conscious self-regulation in order to maintain the necessary emotional-psyche comfort of the pedagogical environment and to create the most favorable conditions for implementation of a learning process. The average level of self-control in 21% of current teachers and in 24% of future teachers raises some concerns about maintaining the necessary balance between rationality and emotionality in the pedagogical process. The results give grounds for assuming a certain deviation from the normal emotionally balanced climate in the school environment. More worrisome are the results related to the low level of self-control in 9% of teachers and 15% of students respectively. In real situations of pedagogical communication, the behavior of these teachers creates risks in several directions: disturbed comfort for children and various deficits in the process of their overall development; deformations in the professionalism of educators at individual level; disturbed microclimate in the pedagogical team and others. The data obtained from the students surveyed draws attention to the need for focused work to build skills for managing feelings and emotions in early childhood and school age. The task of kindergarten and secondary school is to contribute to building skills for self-control and self-regulation in adolescents as an important element of their emotional intelligence and is one of the conditions for their future personal and professional realization.

The data obtained in relation to another important component of emotional intelligence - self-knowledge shows that 53% of the teachers and 42% of the students surveyed have high levels of self-knowledge. The expectations regarding „soft skills“ were not confirmed. Only half of the surveyed teachers have highly developed skills which would allow them to explore their own personality traits. Significantly less than half of the students surveyed have highly-developed self-monitoring and self-analysis skills. Self-knowledge, self-reflection and self-analysis stimulate the pursuit of self-perfection of individuals. When these qualitative features are not formed at the necessary high level, the person inevitably encounters difficulties in their own realization and in revealing their potential. The percentage of respondents in both groups is alarming - 31% of students and 32% of teachers showed low levels of self-knowledge. If we are to make assumptions about the factors that influence the build-up of the skills in question, we could indicate specific characteristics of the professional, academic and wider social environment, which impede in certain ways the quest for self-knowledge and give weight to the external evaluation and control. The causes can also be found in specific emotional-psyche peculiarities on individual level. However, more attention should be paid to combining external analysis, self-analysis and self-assessment both in the teacher's professional development and in the preparation of students from pedagogical specialties.

When measuring the level of the third component of emotional intelligence - "motivation", no significant differences were found among current and prospective teachers. The level of motivation is high in 69% of surveyed teachers and 61% of students. Only 18% of pre-school and school teachers showed average levels of motivation compared to 27% of students preparing for the teaching profession. An alarmingly low level of motivation was reported in 13% of teachers and 12% of students. Motivation as a driving force in the professional activity of

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, R., Tolly, H. Professional tests on emotional intelligence, Sofia 2003, p.117.

pedagogical specialists is an extremely important indicator of their purposefulness and dedication to work. The level of motivation of the teacher also speaks extensively about his pursuit of self-improvement, improvement of qualification and career development. The established low levels of motivation can be due to various reasons, among them: the low social status of the teaching profession; the daily emotional-mental burden; inefficient working mechanisms for career development, etc.

The overall personal and professional appearance of the teacher, an important place is occupied by another structural component of emotional intelligence - empathy. The survey results showed a high level of empathy among 67% of teachers and 66% of students surveyed. An average empathy rate was reported in 26% of current pedagogues and 21% of pedagogy students. A comparatively small proportion of the surveyed individuals - 7% of the teachers and 13% of the students have a low degree of empathy. Being able to put oneself in other's position, receptivity, sensitivity, and responsiveness to everything that excites, gives joy or worries a child in the position of a pedagogical subject is a necessary and precious characteristic of the teacher. The relatively high percentage of respondents from the two groups showing high empathy levels is more than satisfactory. Despite all the conventions and concerns with which the process of selecting cadres in education is marked, however, in the system of pre-school and school education there are professionals with the necessary degree of sensitivity to the emotional world of children, ready to be sympathetic to the experiences of the other - student, parent or colleague. Regarding the relatively high percentage of students who have shown a high level of empathy, optimism is linked to the hope that at the level of the state and society, the responsibility for refining the criteria will be increased, both in terms of selection of educational staff and in the reception of students in pedagogical specialties. Empathy is not the only important personality characteristic, but it is undoubtedly extremely important to anyone who educates and develops young individuals.

Along with the already highlighted components of emotional intelligence, social skills are not less important. In both groups of respondents, a significant percentage of the surveyed have a high level of social skills formation - 63% of teachers and 57% of students. The average level of social skills is shown in 27% of teachers and students. A low level of social skills was found in 10% of current teachers and 16% of students enrolled in pedagogical study programmes. The examined component of emotional intelligence is undoubtedly a significant precondition for the high performance of the educational process. Teacher's social skills favor an effective pedagogical interaction. By self-awareness and enhancing inner motivation, the teacher is able to develop and improve his social skills. The system of qualification and career development of pedagogical specialists should provide good mechanisms for raising the level of teachers' professional competences as well as for faster career growth. In the preparation of students in different pedagogical specialties, the development and improvement of social skills should occupy a significant place in practical training. Rich opportunities provide students' out-of-class activities, research activities and creativity.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The interest in the problem of emotional intelligence of teachers is dictated by the importance of the building components (empathy, motivation, self-regulation, reflection, etc.) for the successful realization of the individual. The level of emotional intelligence is manifested through the ability to control one's own feelings and emotions, to identify and accept one's own feelings, to communicate effectively with others, to perceive, to recognize and to accept the feelings of others. The teacher's ability to understand and manage his feelings is a personal characteristic that is also an indicator of his mental health. Studies in the field of emotional intelligence show that for the successful realization of the personality, the ability to interact effectively with surrounding people, which is manifested in the capacity for effective actions in a system of interpersonal relationships, is very important. It is necessary for the teacher to quickly orient himself in the various social and pedagogical situations. The effectiveness of pedagogical interaction depends on the teacher's observability and sensitivity, and on his ability to analyze and determine the personality and emotional states of others - students, teachers, parents, leaders, etc. On these skills depends the choice of adequate ways of communication and the implementation of the interaction process. The degree of formation of emotional intelligence is also linked to the positive attitude towards the environment of life and work, to others and to ourselves as individuals capable of defining the goals in our life and in our professional activity and working towards their achievement.

The research carried out within the project of the Center for Continuing Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" - Blagoevgrad gave the opportunity for a new understanding of the process of training and qualification of the pedagogical specialists. The data obtained during the course of the empirical study revealed the current state of levels of formation of important structural components of emotional intelligence of pre-school and school teachers and of students who are trained in various pedagogical specialties. The analysis of the results of the conducted survey gives grounds to draw conclusions regarding the great

importance of the socio-emotional, so-called "soft" skills for the successful realization of the contemporary pedagogical specialist on the labor market. It also provides a basis for seeking new approaches, methods and organizational forms of improving the training of future teachers, focusing on increasing self-control, self-knowledge, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

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