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Published in the USA

European Journal of Contemporary Education  
E-ISSN 2305-6746  
2024. 13(1): 5-13  
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2024.1.5  
<https://ejce.cherkasgu.press>

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**European Journal of  
Contemporary Education**



ELECTRONIC JOURNAL

## **The Problems of Contemporary Education**

### **Impact of Psychological Training on the Development of Professionally Important Qualities of an Educational Psychologist**

Artur Aziyev <sup>a, \*</sup>, Kadisha Shalgyrbayeva <sup>a</sup>, Aigul Aitysheva <sup>a</sup>, Akan Alpyssov <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

<sup>b</sup> Pavlodar Pedagogical University, Pavlodar, Republic of Kazakhstan

#### **Abstract**

The experimental study aims to investigate the impact of specially organized psychological training on the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists in perceiving and assessing the personal and behavioral features of schoolchildren. The study utilizes a mixed approach including an analytical and theoretical review of psychological and pedagogical literature and an experiment with educational psychologists from Kazakh schools. The authors employ various psychological tools and assessment methods, including tests to evaluate social intelligence, emotional intelligence, and professional qualities, followed by statistical analysis to assess changes in professional sensitivity. The theoretical analysis discloses the relationship between the improvement of professional sensitivity of an educational psychologist in the perception and assessment of a school student's personality and behavioral characteristics and the specially organized psychological training designed to promote the successful development of professional sensitivity in educational psychologists. Based on the analysis of theoretical provisions regarding the development of professional sensitivity of educational psychologists, the authors clarify the essence of the term "professional sensitivity of an educational psychologist". This theoretical approach serves as a basis to substantiate the process of improvement of the professional sensitivity of an educational psychologist to the perception and assessment of a school student's personality and behavioral characteristics. The study substantiates the provision that specially organized psychological training contributes to the successful development of professional sensitivity in educational psychologists. Experimental findings show a significant improvement in educational psychologists' professional sensitivity after the training. The experimental group demonstrates a marked increase in the indicators of social intelligence (+21.7%), emotional

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [artur.aziyev@mail.ru](mailto:artur.aziyev@mail.ru) (A. Aziyev)

intelligence (+76.3 %), and such professionally important qualities as empathy (+85.3 %) and self-motivation (+49.4 %). On the contrary, the control group displays minimal changes in these parameters. The authors substantiate the high effectiveness of the proposed training for the development of professionally important qualities of an educational psychologist. This is relevant to fostering reflexivity, regulating personal emotions, understanding others' feelings, along with empathy, self-drive, emotional perception, listening skills, and social savvy. Educational establishments are advised to apply the study's findings in practice.

**Keywords:** professional sensitivity, educational psychologist, perception, evaluation, personality and behavioral characteristics of school students, psychological training.

### 1. Introduction

Modern educational approaches place a strong emphasis on enhancing the socio-emotional sustainability and intellectual growth of students (Rakhimgalieva et al., 2021; Ybyrainzhanov et al., 2023). Within this context, the role of educational psychologists is very important (Yespolova et al., 2019). There is a broad consensus in contemporary educational theory that students' academic success is closely associated with their emotional and social skills (Stavruk et al., 2023; Nikolaeva, Suslennikova, 2022). However, the psychological support of educational psychologists has been unduly neglected.

The professional path of an educational psychologist has been primarily determined by the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, methodological training, and understanding of fundamental scientific concepts. Although these components constitute a critical foundation, practical training and systematic improvement of professionally important qualities are often overlooked. Thus, many educational psychologists end up unprepared for solving the problems associated with their functions.

An important aspect distinguishing educational psychologists from other educators is their ability to recognize the subtleties of students' experiences and interpersonal interactions (Golubeva et al., 2023). In the study, we emphasize the importance of specific qualities that substantially affect the efficiency of educational psychologists' work: reflection, empathy, listening skills, and observational skills (Ybyrainzhanov et al., 2019; Kapustina, Goyushova, 2024; Fiorino et al., 2022). These qualities form the foundation for facilitating positive interactions and achieving positive outcomes in school psychology (Bayazitova et al., 2023).

A professional educational psychologist, in addition to pedagogical qualities, must have a subtle understanding and sensitivity to all events that occur within the school (Mukataeva et al., 2022; Arrieta-Lopez et al., 2019).

In the field of educational psychology, the ability to genuinely understand and empathize with students is a fundamental principle (Karimova et al., 2022). Although people often evaluate or criticize instinctively, educational psychologists must be trained to take a different approach. This approach is based on the art of active listening, which goes beyond simply hearing the words and allows one to decipher unspoken emotions and intentions. Sensitivity involves using every senses to understand the ongoing situations: intonations, changes in facial expression or body posture, excitement, of other aspects that student may face (Fiorino et al., 2022).

In the context of this study, the most important qualities are reflection, empathy, listening, and observation, which are essential for the successful work of an educational psychologist (Gavrilyuk et al., 2018; Kalitko, Soloveva, 2021; Rybalka, 2022; Vasyagina et al., 2022; Yessingaliyeva, 2020).

In his article "Some Significant Learnings", C. Rogers (2002) expressed the benefit he found in being able to understand another individual. Often, the initial reaction to someone else's words is to pass judgment rather than to seek understanding. Grasping the essence of another person carries the risk of personal change, unsettling our established equilibrium because it introduces change. Nevertheless, it is important for spiritual growth to discover value in allowing others to share their feelings with each other.

Thus, listening becomes one of the most important skills. Listening involves understanding the unspoken messages they convey. It also means being aware of our own reactions to what is being said, capturing our responses to the words, actions, and behaviors of others. Essentially, reflective listening acts as unbiased feedback to the speaker, helping ensure the listener's interpretation of the message is accurate, because words often carry multiple meanings or have ambiguous definitions. Through reflective listening, we achieve a deeper and more precise comprehension of the communicated message.

E. Atwater (1988) outlines four reflective response techniques: clarifying, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, and summarizing. It's essential for educational psychologists in practice to master active listening when interacting with students. Frequently, the most significant contribution a psychologist can offer is their undivided attention, striving to comprehend and acknowledge the student's perspective without the intrusion of personal biases, assessments, or judgments.

The adoption of ineffective behavioral strategies could stem from an individual's personality characteristics or a lack of knowledge about actively engaging in the lives of others. Consequently, enhancing professional competencies to cultivate empathy is of primary importance.

Researchers point out three spheres of possible influence on a person for the development of their professional qualities: work with the regulatory sphere, work with the cognitive sphere, and the third way, in which the development of professionally important qualities is achieved through specific exercises, as well as under the conditions imposed on the person by their professional activity.

The present study focuses on the professionally important qualities of an educational psychologist, such as listening skills, empathy, reflection, and observational skills. In our opinion, these are the leading qualities that define the success of professional psychological practice in a school. For this reason, we believe that the third direction, which assumes the development of professionally important qualities through exercises and the impact of the conditions of professional practice, is the most efficient for the development of professional skills. This approach enables educational psychologists to directly apply and advance their skills in real situations, which accurately represents their professional role (Alimova et al., 2023). Furthermore, this approach agrees with the position that such qualities as compassion and communication skills are best developed through practical experience. Such exercises promote adaptability and context awareness, which are essential qualities for educational psychologists who have to navigate a variety of students' situations.

Particularly useful for the development of professional qualities are assertiveness master classes, "gymnastics of feelings". For a person to form a given mental formation (image, concept), it is first necessary to identify the activity that this concept serves. The first task of the teacher is to find or build such an activity. In this case, such an activity is represented by specially selected training exercises (Raigrodskii, 2002).

The choice of training as a means of improving the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists was made from the following considerations:

- Psychological training is one of the most accessible ways to dramatically accelerate group learning which is achieved through strong emotional reinforcement and enhanced feedback. The person becomes what they are in themselves through what they are to others. Individuals evolve through interactions, as these interactions contribute to a more authentic and profound self-reflection and self-awareness, according to Pogrebnaya (2021) and Rogers (2002);

- Feedback also stimulates the processes of identification and reflection. According to Kabbassova, Sakenov (2021), Koishigulova, Kisamedenova (2020), and Mambetalina (2012), identification and reflection intertwine as methods for individuals to understand themselves through the lens of others;

- The process of reflection, unfolding in the context of joint activity (which, of course, training is), is defined as the subject's attention to themselves and their consciousness, in particular, to the products of their activity, as well as any rethinking of them, and also as the subject's awareness of how they are perceived and evaluated by others;

- A person can learn to act and think only on their own, by thinking, acting, and doing. Training provides such an opportunity and offers favorable conditions when the cost of error is insignificant. Training also allows the participants to appropriate the acquired experience, to subject it to reflection, criticism, and, consequently, development;

- The group method of work allows increasing the intensity and persistence of emerging changes, maximizing the opportunities of each participant. Exercises, games, and obligatory rituals included in the training program serve as a means of correcting one's behavior (Sergeeva et al., 2021). The person begins to realize the possibility of voluntary mastery of their behavior using the experience accumulated by other people. This method promotes the voluntary control over one's actions, enriches analytical skills, and underscores the benefits of analytical methods;

- Training is used at different stages of education and practice of educational psychologists.

Thus, the relevance of the chosen topic is determined by the fact that the issue of developing professionally important qualities stems from the need to improve the professional sensitivity of

the educational psychologist to the perception and evaluation of the features of personality and behavior of school students.

The purpose of the present study is to empirically confirm that the use of specially organized psychological training improves the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists in perceiving and evaluating the features of school students' personalities and behavior.

## **2. Methods**

### *Study design:*

To achieve the purpose of the study, we adopted an approach, which included quantitative research methods. The study was conducted in 2023 in schools in Kazakhstan.

### *Participants:*

The study covered 140 beginner and practicing educational psychologists. Selection criteria included professionals aged 20 to 29 at varying levels of experience, which provided a diverse and representative sample. The participants were divided into two groups: experimental and control. The distribution was done randomly to ensure the equivalence of the groups. A computer-generated random number sequence was employed to allocate participants into two groups. Individuals assigned an even number were placed in the experimental group, those with an odd number – to the control group. This method ensured that each participant had an equal chance of being assigned to either the control or the experimental group, thereby minimizing selection bias.

The motivation for participation in the study of educational psychologists was their striving for self-knowledge and self-improvement.

### *The study was conducted in several stages:*

**Stage 1. Analytical review and theoretical study of psychological and pedagogical literature.** We examined modern approaches to the development of professional qualities of an educational psychologist by the following authors: Oltarzhevskaya et al. (2022), Manashova et al. (2021), Vasileva (2020), Sakenov et al. (2022), Dombek, Lebedeva (2021), Kaziyev et al. (2020), Kabbassova et al. (2021).

**Stage 2.** Primary diagnostics aimed at establishing baseline indicators of professionally important qualities among all participants.

Assessment was carried out using the following tests:

- A.V. Karpov's "Diagnostics of Reflection";
- A. Mehrabian's "Measure of Emotional Empathy";
- N. Hall's "Emotional Intelligence Test";
- A.G. Gaishut's "Can You Listen?"

**Stage 3.** A training program developing professionally important qualities of an educational psychologist was developed and used, followed by repeated assessments using the same methods.

The control group, consisting of 70 educational psychologists, received no special training during the study period. They continued to perform their usual professional duties, which included providing psychological support to students, without the structured training provided to the experimental group.

The practical exercises included in the training program for educational psychologists of the experimental group were designed to provide participants with practical experience and opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge in real situations. These exercises were aimed at enhancing their professionally important qualities and included the following.

**Active Listening Practice:** The students participated in simulated student-teacher interactions, where they practiced active listening techniques, such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and reflecting feelings.

**Conflict Resolution Simulations:** Role-play scenarios were created to mimic real-life conflicts that students might face.

**Counseling Role-Plays:** Through one-on-one role-plays, the study participants took on the role of a counselor and student and interacted with a student facing various issues. This allowed them to apply counseling techniques, empathy, and effective communication strategies.

**Group Counseling:** The participants designed and led group counseling sessions for their peers.

**Case Analysis:** Complex case studies were provided, and the participants were asked to analyze them. They had to identify underlying issues, devise action plans, and make decisions based on their assessments.

**Observation and Feedback:** The educational psychologists spent time observing actual classroom situations and provided constructive feedback to each other.

**Role-Playing Scenarios:** Challenging scenarios were presented, and the participants practiced responding appropriately. These scenarios covered various aspects of their role, from dealing with emotional students to addressing behavioral issues.

**Self-Reflective Journaling:** The participants were encouraged to maintain reflective journals. They wrote about their experiences, self-assessments, and insights gained during the training, promoting self-awareness and self-improvement.

**Peer Consultation:** The students engaged in peer consultation sessions, discussing challenging cases and seeking input from colleagues. This fostered a collaborative learning environment and provided different perspectives on problem-solving.

**Assessment and Feedback:** Regular assessments of students' performance were conducted, and feedback was provided to help them understand their strengths and areas requiring improvement.

**Stage 4.** Data analysis and interpretation. The statistical package "Stadia" (author A.P. Kulaichev; registration No. 1205) (Raigorodskii, 2002) and the t-test of independent variables at the significance level of  $p = 0.05$  were used to process the results.

To analyze the data and confirm the results, we used the following hypotheses.

The null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): the specially organized psychological training does not significantly improve the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists' ability to discern and evaluate the unique personality traits and behavioral patterns of students.

The alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): the specially organized psychological training could greatly improve the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists to accurately perceive and assess the distinct personality traits and behavioral tendencies of students.

### 3. Results

Initial assessments of social intelligence revealed that participants had average and below average ability to understand behavior, demonstrated poor skills in interpreting behavior, faced challenges in understanding and forecasting others' actions in a communication situation, and problems in social adaptation.

Similarly, initially evaluations of emotional intelligence showed that a majority of the participants were ineffective at recognizing and managing their own emotions, understanding others' feelings, or providing support during emotionally challenging situations.

According to "Diagnostics of Reflection", "Measure of Emotional Empathy", "Self-Monitoring Scale", and "Can You Listen?" by A.G. Gaishut (Raigorodskii, 2002), the highest results in primary diagnostics were observed in the indicators of listening skills development and self-control in communication, and the lowest results were found in the indicators of reflection and empathy development.

According to the results of repeated diagnostics of social intelligence, authors suggest that participants had developed their capacity to interpret behavior to average and above average levels. Students demonstrated ability to understand behavior, identifying verbal and non-verbal expressions of behavior, recognized common properties in the flow of expressive and situational information about behavior, understood and predicted behavior and attitudes, and understood the logic of the development of holistic situations of people's interaction and the meaning of their behavior in these situations (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Comparative Analysis of Initial and Follow-Up Diagnostics of Social Intelligence Development Using Guilford's Methodology

Indicator, points	Control group	Experimental group	t-value*
Subtest 1	3.1	3.6	-4.7246
Subtest 2	2.3	2.9	-3.0736
Subtest 3	2.7	3.0	-1.5596
Subtest 4	2.0	2.6	-2.0364
Cumulative Result	2.3	2.8	-4.3712

\* p-value – 0.05



The differences in the mean values of primary and repeated assessments are statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level (or 95 % confidence level); therefore, H1 is rejected.

Repeated assessment of emotional intelligence shows that most respondents had a developed ability to recognize and cope with their own emotions, understand the experiences of other people, and support them in emotionally challenging situations (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Results of comparative analysis based on "Emotional Intelligence Test"

Indicators of analysis	Results of the test by scales, points					
	Emotional awareness	Managing your emotions	Self-motivation	Empathy	Recognizing the emotions of other people	Integral level
Control group	9.8	3.5	7.9	6.8	5.8	33.8
Experimental group	14.3	8.0	11.8	12.6	12.9	59.6
Difference of indicators, %	45.9	128.6	49.4	85.3	122.4	76.3
t-value	-26.63	-26.63	-23.05	-34.21	-41.42	-151.48

\* p-value – 0.05

The t-values for all the indicators are highly negative, reflecting the substantial differences between the primary and repeated diagnosis groups. The results of the study provide strong evidence against H0 and in favor of H1. The substantial improvements in various aspects of emotional intelligence and integrative skills among the participants who underwent the psychological training program suggest that such training significantly enhances the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists.

According to "Diagnostics of Reflection", "Measure of Emotional Empathy", "Self-Monitoring Scale", and "Can You Listen?", high results were observed by the indicators of the ability to listen and self-control in communication (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Result of comparative analysis of data using the deployed methods

Indicators of analysis	Results of the test by scales, points				
	"Diagnostics of Reflection"	"Measure of Emotional Empathy"	"Self-Monitoring Scale"	Test 1 "Can You Listen?"	Test 2 "Can You Listen?"
Control group	3.0	4.5	5.0	47.2	70.6
Experimental group	7.1	5.6	6.3	29.2	74.8
Difference of indicators, %	136.7	24.4	26.0	-38.1	5.9
t-value	-14.14	-3.32	-4.14	13.46	-14.85

\* p-value – 0.05

The t-values calculated for various methodologies and tests indicate significant differences in the results between the primary and repeated diagnostics, supporting H0. Specifically, "Diagnostics of Reflection," "Measure of Emotional Empathy," and "Self-Monitoring Scale" all show substantial changes in scores, implying that the diagnostic sessions had a significant impact on these indicators. Additionally, "Can You Listen?" (Test 1 and Test 2) also demonstrate significant differences. Notably, Test 1 scores increased in repeated diagnostics, while Test 2 scores decreased. These findings collectively suggest that the diagnostic sessions had a notable influence on the measured parameters and underscore the significance of the changes observed in these assessments.

The novelty and originality of our study are demonstrated by the fact that, unlike the studies by S.K. Pogrebnaya (2021), V. Rybalka (2022), and A.S. Mambetalina (2012), it substantiates the enhancement of educational psychologists' professional sensitivity. Firstly, participants demonstrated an improved capability to perceive behaviors, discerning both verbal and non-verbal cues within various contexts, identifying shared traits in a range of expressive and situational

behavioral information, and accurately predicting behaviors and attitudes. Secondly, through repeated assessments of emotional intelligence, the majority of participants were able to recognize and manage their emotional states, empathize with others' experiences, and offer support in emotionally challenging situations. Moreover, tools like "Diagnostics of Reflection," "Measure of Emotional Empathy," "Self-Monitoring Scale," and "Can You Listen?" revealed significant improvements in listening skills and self-regulation in communication as some of the most enhanced aspects post-training.

By the end of the experiment participants developed a deeper understanding of the developmental logic of human interactions and the shifting dynamics when new individuals engage in communication. Through logical deduction, participants became adept at identifying missing elements in interaction chains, predicting future behaviors, and understanding the motivations behind certain actions. Their capacity to grasp the goals, intentions, and needs of communication participants and to foresee the outcomes of behaviors also saw substantial growth.

To address the limitation of the study it is important to mention that the participants were selected from a specific geographic and professional context, which may limit the applicability of the findings to educational psychologists working in different cultural or educational settings.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, we have examined the effects of psychological training on the development of professionally important qualities in educational psychologists. The results provided evidence that such training significantly enhances key competencies including emotional intelligence, empathy, self-motivation, and social intelligence. Specifically, the experimental group, subjected to the psychological training, showed marked improvements in these areas compared to the control group, which did not receive the training.

Importantly, the study's findings have practical implications for the training and development of educational psychologists. They suggest that incorporating structured psychological training programs into educational curricula could better equip psychologists to address the complexities of their roles within schools.

It was discovered by the authors that targeted psychological training plays a significant role in enhancing the professional sensitivity of educational psychologists, that fully confirming the hypothesis.

The suggested approach may benefit education institutions in structuring psychological assistance for educational psychologists, thereby easing their transition into their professional roles.

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