

# TEACHERS' EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER SOCIOEMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

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## Abstract

Teachers' socioemotional competencies are crucial for the development of an effective teaching-learning process. This study analyzes the relationships between these competencies, particularly, emotional communication, empathy and emotional intelligence. A total of 184 preschool and primary school teachers participated and completed three questionnaires assessing these competencies. The results indicate that there are relationships between them and that emotional intelligence acts as a mediator in the ability to communicate affectively. In addition, there is a different influence of cognitive empathy versus affective empathy on teachers' emotional communication.

**Key words:** Emotional communication; teachers' emotional competencies; teacher-student interaction; primary education.

## 1. Introduction

Social-emotional competencies are important for good professional performance, as through them quality bonds and relationships are created (Barrientos-Fernández; Pericacho and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2020; Figueroa-Varela and Rodríguez, 2023). This is crucial in professions that involve contact with people, such as in education. In fact, we know that the relationships that teachers establish with their students are of key importance in the teaching-learning process (Fraire et al., 2013; Longobardi et al., 2016), in which students accept the teacher as a person who mediates between them and knowledge (Uroza and Orozco, 2017). Moreover, teachers should incorporate didactic strategies that promote this interaction, creating an environment that is conducive learning for their students (De Almeida et al., 2022). Even when teachers engage in concrete activities, such as follow-up reading with their primary school students, there is an emotional and creative convergence between teacher and students, which can be observed at the physiological level (Qi, Zhang, Dong & Zhao, 2024). Consequently, in Spain, there has been a move towards an educational curriculum that contemplates these competences (Porrás et al., 2020). Indeed, Spain has participated in a European study that highlights the

importance of these competencies and their relationship with well-being and health (Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports, 2023).

Social-emotional competencies enhance the classroom environment and can improve the academic, social and emotional performance of students (Jennings et al., 2017; Pérez-Quevedo, Casanova-Ferrer and Urdaneta-Fernández, 2025). Additionally, according to Vergaray et al. (2021), working on the emotional management of children promotes personal development and improves coexistence, in which the teacher serves as a model. In this way, students observe the teacher and learn the ways he or she uses to manage frustration, express disagreement in an assertive manner, maintain self-control, focus attention on what is most important, express emotions or change strategies when something does not work. Consequently, students tend to behave similarly with their peers in class, creating a supportive climate among the students themselves (Brackett and Salovey, 2007). Therefore, it seems that when teachers possess emotional intelligence, it is more likely they will foster this competence in their students (Colomeischi, 2015). In addition, it is important to note that the emotional competences of schoolchildren, particularly their emotional intelligence, are also related to appropriate school behavior (Luque-González, Gómez-Ortiz, Laudańska-Krzemińska, Antypas, & Muller, 2022).

It is obvious that, to establish this relationship, interpersonal communication is key. This is understood as a bidirectional, propositional, multidimensional process with consequences in relationships (Hernández-Jorge and De la Rosa, 2018). It enables a shared dialogue (Sehnm, et al., 2021) and encourages students to explicitly communicate their ideas, accept mistakes in order to continue learning and gain self-confidence and autonomy. Therefore, educational communication favors the social construction of knowledge, as well as positive and motivating learning (Ibañez and Gómez, 2021). It is noteworthy that this communication is characterized by an emotional component, namely, the affective quality of communication. This component is indicative of a teacher-student interaction with a high degree of influence and proximity between the teacher and student (Di Fabio,

2015; Laudadio and Mazzitelli, 2018). Furthermore, it is associated with the expression of favorable feelings (Sehnm et al., 2021). Different authors incorporate the affective variable to define teacher-student interaction, referring to teachers' affection as a necessary element for students to succeed in learning. This is especially relevant if it is accompanied by variables such as passion, sympathy, and teacher dedication. Moreover, there is an emotional bond shared between the teacher and student, through the interaction they maintain (Jamil et al., 2015; Rodríguez, 2018; Kostiv, 2022).

Communication in the classroom involves information exchange, in which feelings and thoughts are transmitted and reflected through emotions. Emotional communication competence refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes used by teachers to express and assertively regulate emotional phenomena (Machado, 2022). Therefore, it has a competency character that gives it the nuance of "know-how" and helps build positive relationships between people, establishing bonds of respect and collaboration (Calvo, 2020). Emotional communication, according to Hernández-Jorge, et al. (2022) has three fundamental components: communicative proactivity, openness and authenticity, and listening.

According to the above study, communicative proactivity involves the intention to communicate, maintaining closeness with other people, understanding their emotions and situations, maintaining an attitude of respect and tolerance, showing attention and concern for the person with whom one is communicating and having a predisposition to listen actively. Openness and authenticity refer to the personal information offered to the other person, the expression of one's own needs and emotions, expressing oneself openly without deception, being expressive with the face and maintaining congruence between verbal and non-verbal language through facial expression. Finally, listening is the use of active listening strategies, such as paraphrasing, asking questions to gather information about the other person's situation and external listening skills such as looking, nodding and not interrupting.

Research indicates that teachers who use favorable attitudes and emotional competencies generate proactive educational environments, provide effective

learning and contribute to students' emotional development (Juarez et al., 2021). By contrast, when teachers maintain insincere and inauthentic nonverbal communication, and they are opaque when transmitting information and show little communicative competence, students tend to invest much more effort in controlling themselves emotionally when dialoguing with these teachers. This effort can generate uncomfortable and intense emotions in students. However, when students perceive a sincere and authentic nonverbal communication from their teachers, clarity when conveying information and communicative competence, they tend to feel supported by them (Mazer, et al., 2014).

Different authors point out that emotion and communication go hand in hand, so that there is a relationship between using communication skills and possessing emotional intelligence in future teachers (Ozkaral & Ustu, 2019). This is why the importance of training education students in these competencies is highlighted (Fernández-Berrocal & Cabello, 2021; Porras et al., 2020). An effect, albeit indirect, has also been detected in the communication that school principals maintain with their teachers when they support them emotionally. This communication is based on empathic listening, offering explicit messages of empowerment and normalizing moderately problematic situations (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018). Moreover, it has been found that the use of collaborative and cooperative activities can favor the establishment of empathic relationships, assertive behaviors and active listening (Sardiñas et al., 2020). Thus, the use of communication is an essential resource for the management of all the processes that take place in the educational community in which teachers participate as the main protagonists (Sardiñas et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to develop adequate communication skills and to establish favorable relationships and links with students (Bibi et al., 2015), since "assertive communication affects teaching performance and is essential to generate learning (Rojas et al., 2022, p. 6)".

In short, all the above points highlight the importance of teachers' emotional communication as a key educational tool for establishing a connection and bond

with students during the teaching-learning process. Consequently, teachers with adequate socioemotional competencies develop assertive communicative strategies to manage diverse situations, implement practices that encourage autonomy and respect for the rules, and promote values of coexistence in the classroom (Pacheco et al., 2019). Therefore, training in positive attitudes through greater personal knowledge, the development of competencies to recognize their students' reactions, identifying and establishing challenges, active communication are all important for creating the right conditions for learning and enhancing emotional competencies (Juarez et al., 2021).

Another socioemotional competence par excellence is Emotional Intelligence. However, although there is still no consensus on the theoretical model (Lozano-Peña et al, 2022), most research has been supported by the theory of emotional intelligence provided by Mayer and Salovey (1997), who define it as:

"The ability to perceive, appraise and express emotions accurately, the ability to access and/or generate feelings that facilitate thinking; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge and the ability to regulate emotions promoting emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer and Salovey, 1997, p. 5, cited by Fernández and Extremera, 2005).

The model provided by the authors assumes that a person should not only know him/herself but also learn to modulate and understand the emotions of others (Machado, 2022). In this way, emotions are incorporated into the logic of the social (Dahlgren, 2012). When studying this competence, the contributions of positive psychology or multiple intelligences, among others, have had great relevance (Llorent et al., 2020).

Colomeischi (2015) argues that teachers should include personal development plans to maintain optimal mental and emotional health. As when a teacher has emotional intelligence, it is more common for them to generate these aspects in their students, as we mentioned above regarding socioemotional competencies. Different reviews show that emotional intelligence is relevant for the development

of empathic, civic and tolerant behaviors towards peers, leading to more satisfactory and positive relationships (Fernández-Berrocal & Cabello, 2021). In addition, emotional intelligence and empathy are related to fewer problematic behaviors in the classroom, at least in primary education, showing that a higher level of emotional intelligence and empathy in students is related to a lower frequency of disruptive behaviors (Corral-Martínez & Gómez- Cuevas, 2021). Therefore, more emotionally intelligent students know how to manage the complex social world around them more effectively and to build better relationships with their teachers, classmates and family members, which is an index of their academic success (Fernández Berrocal & Cabello, 2021).

As stated in the above study, empathy is an important socioemotional competence for establishing bonds, which is defined as putting oneself in other people's situation (cognitive empathy) and feeling how they feel (affective empathy). Specifically, we know that empathic listening enhances mutual understanding (Mineyama et al., 2007) and includes attitudes such as unconditional positive acceptance in order to understand as fully as possible the message conveyed by the person to whom we are listening (Robertson 2005; McNaughton et al., 2008; Weger et al., 2010).

It is evident that empathy occupies a central place in relationships between human beings and if it is not given enough attention or if it is inappropriate, it can negatively impact children's development (Vaquier et al., 2020). In the educational environment, generating empathy is fundamental for the development of schoolchildren as human beings, preventing, among other aspects, situations of bullying and school violence (Vaquier et al., 2020) and stimulating coexistence (Nuñez et al., 2021).

When teachers have optimal levels of empathy; they tend to carry out activities that include all students in the classroom, they contribute to the optimal development of their students' personalities, so that they feel valued, safe and welcomed (Vaquier et al., 2020). On the contrary, when teachers are not empathic enough or have empathic stress, it can damage interpersonal relationships, the educational process

and even the professional's own mental health, as they are more prone to burnout (Rodríguez, 2018).

For all these reasons, we have carried out this study with the aim of analyzing the relationships established between different socioemotional competencies of teachers, specifically between communication, empathy and emotional intelligence.

**2. Material and methods**

Participants

There were 184 practising teachers who participated in this study, 126 were women and 58 men, belonging to public (103), private (9) and state-subsidised (72) schools. Most of them (175) were from the Canary Islands (Spain) and taught at the preschool stage (12), both infant and preschool (34) or only at the primary stage (138).

Table 1

Data on participants

Sex		Type of school			Educational stage		
Men	Women	Public	Private	Private Subsidised	Pre-school	Preschool and primary	Primary School
126	58	103	9	72	12	34	138
68.5%	31.5%	56%	4,9%	39.1%	6,5%	18,5%	75%

Instruments

Three instruments were used to carry out this research.

The TMMS-24, which assesses emotional intelligence, is based on the TMMS (Trait Meta-Mood Scale) of Salovey and Mayer's research group (1990). The original scale is a trait scale that assesses the meta-cognition of emotional states by means of 48 items. It has been adapted to the Spanish population (Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, & Ramos, 2004). This version is composed of three dimensions with eight items each: Emotional Attention: ability to be aware of and pay attention to one's emotions; Emotional Clarity: ability to understand and be

clear about one's emotions; and Emotional Repair: ability to regulate and manage emotions effectively. In our sample, Cronbach's alpha indices were 0.89 for the three factors of the questionnaire.

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1980,1983), validated in Spain by Pérez-Albéniz, De Paul, Etxeberria, Montes & Torres (2003) and Mestre, Frías & Samper (2004). This questionnaire assesses empathy and consists of 28 items distributed in four subscales that measure four dimensions of the global concept of empathy. The Perspective Taking and Fantasy subscales focus on assessing the cognitive aspect, reflecting a person's ability to spontaneously accept the perspectives of others in everyday life and the tendency of people to identify with fictional characters in films and literature, revealing their imaginations that immerse them in fictional situations. The Empathic Concern and Personal Distress subscales measure people's emotional responses to the negative experiences of others. The former assesses emotions directed at others, such as compassion, concern and love for others' discomfort; while the latter examines the feelings of anxiety and discomfort that individuals experience when they witness others' difficulties directed at themselves. The following Cronbach's alpha indices were found: Perspective Taking (.67); Fantasy (.71); Empathic Concern (.47) and Empathic Discomfort (.76).

The Emotional Communication questionnaire (Hernández-Jorge, et al, 2022) consists of 14 items that include three dimensions of the global concept of emotional communication: Emotional communicative proactivity, which involves being predisposed to communication and listening, generating a certain climate of closeness to the people with whom one communicates, understanding the emotions of others, maintaining an attitude of respect and tolerance, paying attention and concern for the person with whom one is communicating. Openness and Authenticity, which is understood as the ability to talk about one's own needs,

emotions and ideas. And finally, Listening, which includes the ability to listen actively and to inquire into what the other person is saying or understanding. In our study, Cronbach's alpha indices were as follows: Communicative Proactivity (.81); Openness and Authenticity (.74); Listening (.52).

The three scales have a Likert-type response format with five levels, to be answered according to the degree of agreement or disagreement. They range from 1=Not agree at all to 5=Strongly agree.

#### Procedure

Several meetings were held with the teaching staff to explain the aim of the research into teachers' emotional competences. Subsequently, teachers were sent the links to the questionnaires in a Google form. This form contained information about the research and after reading it, the teachers gave their consent to fill in the questionnaires. The information was collected throughout 2024. The responses collected were entered into an Excel document and then into the SPSS statistical package for data analysis. At the conclusion of data collection, it was necessary to organise the sample, discarding those participants who did not meet the requirements of the study.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Data cleaning

Prior to statistical analyses, the database was cleaned to ensure the quality of the results and their interpretation. The analyses were carried out using SPSS v.25 statistical software, except for the structural equation models, which were carried out using AMOS v.23.

Participants who did not meet the requirements to form part of the sample were eliminated. A total of 11 subjects were eliminated: two participants who were not assigned to teach at the time of the research and 9 teachers corresponding to the Compulsory Secondary Education stage. One participant was also eliminated due

to missing values on most of the scales, so the final sample consisted of 184 participants. The Mahalanobis distance procedure and the Chi-square test (Ho, 2014) were used to detect outliers, but no extreme values were detected. Moreover, the nature of the data was analysed to determine whether score transformation was necessary. Since the skewness and kurtosis values of all variables are within the range  $\pm 1.96$  (Ho, 2014), the normality of the data was confirmed (see Table 2).

Table 2  
Descriptive statistics of the variables

	M	Sd	Asymmetry		Kurtosis		Mín.	Máx.
			Est.	Sd	Est.	Sd		
EMO_COM_	4.49	.439	-.829	.179	,436	.356	2.83	5.00
PROACTIVITY								
EMO_COM_	4.06	.563	-.272	.179	-,596	.356	2.80	5.00
OPENNESS								
EMO_COM_	4.12	.604	-.463	.179	-,034	.356	2.00	5.00
LISTENING								
EMPATHY_	3.99	.579	-.841	.179	1,894	.356	1.29	5.00
PERSPECTIVE								
EMPATHY_	3.93	.465	-.311	.179	-,008	.356	2.38	4.88
CONCERN								
EMO_INT_	3.77	.700	-.484	.179	-,150	.356	1.88	5.00
ATTENTION								
INT_EMO_	3.84	.645	-.070	.179	-,448	.356	2.00	5.00
CLARITY								
INT_EMO_	3.96	.692	-.738	.179	,297	.356	2.00	5.00
REPARATION								

### 3.2. Analysis of the structural equation model

First, a correlation analysis was conducted to find out the relationship between the variables. As shown in Table 3, all correlations were significant except for the emotional intelligence factors of Clarity ( $r = .087, p =$ ) and Repair ( $r = .116, p =$ ) for the Empathic Concern factor. The correlations of the Communicative Proactivity factor of the Emotional Communication construct stand out, as they are the ones with the highest intensity, with most correlations above .30. Both the Openness and Listening factors present significant correlations with the rest of the variables, but all are below .30, except for Openness and Authenticity with Clarity ( $r = .422, p < .001$ ) and Reparation ( $r = .333, p < .001$ ).

Table 3

Correlation matrix

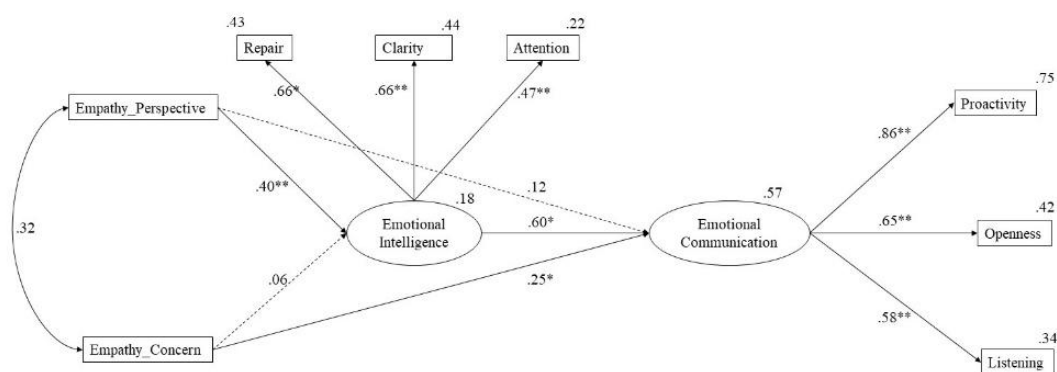
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EMO_COM_	1							
PROACTIVITY								
EMO_COM_	.551***	1						
OPENNESS								
EMO_COM_	.509***	.394***	1					
LISTENING								
EMPATHY_	.395***	.278***	.266***	1				
PERSPECTIVE								
EMPATHY_	.379***	.147*	.245***	.317***	1			
CONCERN								
EMO_INT_	.263***	.255***	.238***	.199**	.174*	1		
ATTENTION								
INT_EMO_	.416***	.433***	.219**	.218**	.087	.301***	1	
CLARITY								
INT_EMO_	.361***	.333***	.174*	.344***	.116	.337***	.432***	1
REPARATION								

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Based on these relationships, a structural equation model was tested to see to what extent Emotional Intelligence and Empathy predict Emotional Communication. Thus, Emotional Intelligence and Empathy were established as predictor variables, establishing a direct relationship between Emotional Communication, as well as an indirect effect on Emotional Intelligence mediated through Empathy. An initial model was tested with all the variables involved, which obtained good fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 1.523$ ; CFI = .973; GFI = .968; RMSEA = .053; SRMR = ; AIC = 64.368). The interaction of the variables explained 57% of the variance of Emotional Communication, as well as between 34 and 75% of the emotional communication factors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Model 1 with all variables



Note: The errors associated with the variables have been removed from the model for a better understanding of the model. Dotted lines represent non-significant relationships. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

When analysing the relationships between the variables (see Table 4), in terms of empathy, the Empathic Concern factor exerted a direct effect on Emotional

Communication ( $\beta = .249, p < .05$ ), while the Perspective Taking factor exerted an indirect effect. Thus, the relationship between Perspective Taking and Emotional Communication was mediated through Emotional Intelligence ( $\beta = .244, p < .01$ ). On the other hand, Emotional Intelligence had a direct effect on Emotional Communication ( $\beta = .602, p < .05$ ).

Looking at the factors of Emotional Communication, Communicative Proactivity was the factor which explained the highest percentage of variance (75%). When looking at the standardised coefficients, the effects on the Proactivity factor were greater, both direct and indirect, than the other two Communication factors. For this reason, it was decided to run an alternative version of the model that included only this factor.

Table 4

Standardised coefficients of Model 2

Effects	$\beta$	$p$
Direct effects		
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Emotional Intelligence	.405	.005
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Emotional Communication	.119	.321
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Emotional Intelligence	.058	.644
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Emotional Communication	.249	.016
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Repair	.658	.023
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Clarity	.665	.004
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Attention	.474	.009
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Emotional Communication	.602	.019
Emotional Communication $\square$ Proactivity	.863	.007
Emotional Communication $\square$ Openness	.650	.009
Emotional Communication $\square$ Listening	.581	.007

Effects	$\beta$	$p$
Indirect effects		
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Emotional Communication	.244	.008
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Proactivity	.313	.007
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Openness	.235	.014
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Listening	.211	.012
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Repair	.266	.010
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Clarity	.269	.007
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Attention	.192	.006
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Emotional Communication	.035	.507
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Proactivity	.245	.012
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Openness	.185	.009
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Listening	.165	.010
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Repair	.038	.627
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Clarity	.038	.625
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Attention	.027	.522
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Proactivity	.519	.021
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Openness	.391	.013
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Listening	.350	.009

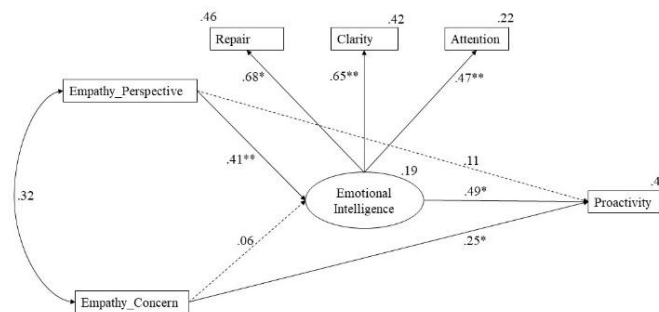
The second model (see Figure 2) obtains better fit indices ( $X^2/df = 1.314$ ; CFI = .989; GFI = .986; RMSEA = .041; SRMR = ; AIC = 37.885), and the smaller AIC index confirmed the greater parsimony and adequacy of this second model.

This model explained 42% of the variance of the Communicative Proactivity factor, which is a decrease compared to the previous model, but hardly altered the relationships found with the rest of the variables (see Table 5). Thus, a direct effect of Emotional Intelligence ( $\beta = .487, p < .05$ ) and of the Empathic Concern factor ( $\beta = .254, p < .01$ ) on Proactivity was observed, maintaining practically the same  $\beta$  with

respect to the previous model on the latent variable of Emotional Communication. On the other hand, Emotional Intelligence also measures the relationship between the Perspective Taking factor and the Communicative Proactivity factor, given that the direct effect was not significant ( $\beta = .106, p = .374$ ), but the indirect effect was significant ( $\beta = .199, p < .01$ ).

Figure 2

Model 2 with the Communicative Proactivity factor



Note: The errors associated with the variables have been removed from the model for a better understanding of the model. Dotted lines represent non-significant relationships. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Table 5

Standardised coefficients of Model 2

Effects	$\beta$	$p$
Direct effects		
Empathy_Perspective □ Emotional Intelligence	.410	.003
Empathy_Perspective □ Proactivity	.106	.374
Empathy_Concern □ Emotional Intelligence	.056	.641
Empathy_Concern □ Proactivity	.254	.005
Emotional Intelligence □ Repair	.677	.015

Effects	$\beta$	$p$
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Clarity	.651	.006
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Attention	.469	.007
Emotional Intelligence $\square$ Proactivity	.487	.012
Indirect effects		
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Proactivity	.199	.005
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Repair	.277	.009
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Clarity	.266	.005
Empathy_Perspective $\square$ Attention	.192	.006
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Proactivity	.027	.502
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Repair	.038	.641
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Clarity	.037	.640
Empathy_Concern $\square$ Attention	.026	.552

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this research is to analyse the relationships between teachers' socioemotional competences, specifically between communication, empathy and emotional intelligence.

First, based on the structural models obtained, we can state that there are relationships between the emotional competences analysed. It was shown that emotional communication, empathy and emotional intelligence are positively related to each other. This result is relevant as it provides an integrated and complementary understanding of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competences, especially as what we are trying to describe is the ability to communicate emotionally. Indeed, if we cannot recognise, assume and understand our own emotions and those of others, how are we going to establish a communicative link with others?

There are several studies that support this idea. Emotional competences are often linked so that people with adequate emotional intelligence tend to communicate better and generate empathy in their interpersonal relationships (Ozkaral y Ustu,

2019; Pacheco et al., 2019; Fernández-Berrocal & Cabello, 2021; Vaquier et al., 2020; Machado, 2022).

Furthermore, our results have isolated the mediating effect that emotional intelligence has on cognitive empathy in its relationship with affective communication with others. Knowing how to recognise the emotions of others only predicts affective communication competence if emotional intelligence is involved in its different capacities (perceiving, understanding and regulating). This may indicate that the communicative link can be empathic at the cognitive level, if it is based on the competent exercise of one's own emotional experiences, as previous reviews have shown (Fernández-Berrocal & Cabello, 2021).

Nevertheless, one aspect to highlight is the weak relationship between empathic concern and aspects of emotional intelligence, such as understanding and regulating one's own emotional states. This would seem to be a contradiction, based on what was indicated in the previous paragraph regarding the relationship of these emotional competences with cognitive empathy. However, we believe that this result does not indicate that the two dimensions of empathy (empathic perspective and empathic concern) move in two complementary but different realms of competent emotionality. The first (cognitive empathy) is more linked to the competences of emotional awareness and regulation, whereas the second (affective empathy) is more related to those of emotional bonding as proposed by the theoretical model of Rodríguez (2018).

The relationships established in both structural models between communicative proactivity and the rest of the socioemotional competences are also noteworthy. This factor, of a more global nature, indicates the intention to communicate, but not just any form of communication, as it requires being close to people, understanding their emotions and situations, from an attitude of respect and tolerance, showing attention and concern for the person and listening to what they tell us. In other words, from our point of view, it is marked by the affective component of communication highlighted by different authors (Jamil et al., 2015; Rodríguez, 2018; Kostiv, 2022). This could indicate that, together with the other two more

specific factors of emotional communication (openness-authenticity and listening), but in a more comprehensive and influential way, communicative proactivity provides a greater degree of explanation of what it means to be emotionally competent at an interpersonal level.

Furthermore, we can conclude that there are differential effects of emotional intelligence and empathy on emotional communication. We consider that the direct effect that empathic concern has on communicative proactivity is because both variables share aspects of bonding and are oriented towards "others" and both have an affective character, of closeness and concern for other people. This would indicate that emotional communication is nourished by the affective bond that sustains the interpersonal relationship, especially when it is tinged with emotional experiences. This relates to the work of Mineyama et al. (2007), who confirmed the value of empathic listening for interpersonal communicative processes.

On the other hand, the cognitive aspect of empathy (perspective-taking factor) has no direct effect on communicative proactivity, except when the emotional intelligence components mediate, i.e. when emotion recognition and emotion regulation are involved. This is of particular relevance for discriminating when there is a "genuinely" affective-competent communicative disposition, especially when we know that one can pretend to be cognitively empathic, without having any concern for the feelings of others, as in the case of sociopaths or psychopaths.

Some limitations of this study refer to methodological aspects, as the distribution of the sample is irregular in the number of men versus women, although it reflects the educational reality of the Canary Islands and Spain. There is also a preponderance of primary school teachers as opposed to preschool teachers. Finally, it might be interesting to collect the professional experience of teachers at other educational stages, such as secondary education, and observe how the model behaves according to these variables.

The international relevance of our research is related to the evidence that the main resource that teachers have to carry out their teaching function is the

communication that they establish with their students and in particular the emotional interaction that makes it possible for students to be favourably predisposed to learn. It is not enough to communicate, it is also necessary to know how to do it and, above all, to sustain this communication in socio-emotional skills that make it effective, through an affective bond. Moreover, given the competency-based nature of the variables studied in this work, our contribution takes on a special relevance because of the interest it may have for application to the initial and continuous training of teachers in emotional communication skills.

We believe that investigating teachers' emotional competencies is vital, not only for their personal and professional development, but also because through their modeling, they can generate a multiplier effect for their students, with which we can continue to contribute to the personal and collective well-being of citizens.

### **Statement on Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the drafting process**

We confirm that generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were not used in the drafting process of the article. The research and writing of this article were carried out solely by the authors involved in the study.

AI-assisted technology has been used for the first translation of the article from the authors' mother tongue (Spanish) into the language required by the journal (English) before sending it to a translation expert for proofreading.

### **Declaration of competing interests**

None of the authors have any conflict of interest, including any financial, personal or other relationship with other persons or organisations for the work being presented.

All authors have materially participated in the research and preparation of the article and have approved the final article.

The article has not been previously published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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### Data availability

The research data can be consulted in the Repositorio Institucional de la Universidad de La Laguna <https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/handle/915/38223>

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