

Developing Emotional Intelligence for Pre-Service Teachers in Vietnam in the Digital Era

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Abstract: *In the context of the digital era, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly transformed learning, teaching, and educational management (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021; Government of Vietnam, 2020). These transformations place urgent demands on pre-service teachers—the future teaching workforce—to develop adaptive competencies not only in technological knowledge and skills but also in emotional intelligence (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Research by Mayer and Salovey (1990, 1997) affirms that emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions, playing a crucial role in academic and professional performance. Goleman (1995, 1998) further emphasizes that emotional intelligence contributes more to workplace success than IQ. Using a qualitative research approach, this paper analyzes the theoretical foundations, structure, and roles of emotional intelligence, while identifying its significant impact on teacher education in Vietnam during the digital era. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence is essential for managing emotions, developing pedagogical communication skills, adapting to digital learning environments, enhancing teaching quality, and fostering future professional qualities among pre-service teachers (Bar-On, 2006; Gross, 2015). Based on these findings, the paper proposes several solutions aimed at developing a future teaching workforce with strong professional competence, pedagogical skills, and emotional intelligence to meet the demands of Vietnam’s educational reform in the digital age.*

Keywords: Emotion, emotional intelligence, pre-service teachers, Vietnamese education, digital era

1. Introduction

The boom of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology is reshaping the educational ecosystem, from teaching–learning and assessment to school governance. In that context, the role of teachers goes beyond the framework of “transmitting knowledge” to become organizers, facilitators, and inspirers of learning for the generation of digital citizens—those who need to be both proficient in digital competence and have a solid socio-emotional foundation (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2021; Government of Vietnam, 2020). At the same time, the professional standards for teachers (MoET, 2018) set requirements for qualities, pedagogical communication, collaboration, and self-development, and indicate that Emotional intelligence is an indispensable component of teachers’ professional competence.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the competence to recognize, use, understand, and regulate the emotions of oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This

four-branch model both provides a tight conceptual framework for describing emotional behavior in the classroom context and directly orients the design of modules, practicum, and outcome-based assessment (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Based on emotion regulation, contemporary research indicates that selecting and implementing appropriate regulation strategies (such as cognitive reappraisal and response delay) helps individuals maintain performance in high-pressure environments, which is characteristic of digital teaching with a fast pace of interaction and multi-channel feedback requirements (Gross, 2015).

From the reality of Vietnam, the education sector's digital transformation program emphasizes developing digital competence for teachers, innovating teaching–learning methods, managing professional data, and ensuring digital safety for learners (MoET, 2021). At the national level, the National Digital Transformation Program (Decision 749/QĐ-TTg) considers education a priority field, aiming toward digital citizens and an adaptive workforce (Government of Vietnam, 2020). These orientations, combined with the teacher professional standards (MoET, 2018), show that Emotional intelligence needs to be integrated as the “soft core” of digital pedagogical competence: digital competence helps teachers “work with technology,” while Emotional intelligence helps teachers “work with people through technology.”

International evidence supports the above thesis along three axes. First, Emotional intelligence predicts adaptability to change, stress management, and the maintenance of psychological well-being in uncertain contexts—thereby supporting attention, memory, and pedagogical decision-making (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Gross, 2015). Second, Emotional intelligence creates a humanistic advantage different from machines: empathy, compassion, and the ability to build trusting relationships—core characteristics of the teaching profession (Goleman, 1995/2013; Bar-On, 2006). Third, Emotional intelligence is associated with teamwork effectiveness in digital and online environments, where coordination through digital platforms requires both technological skills and socio-emotional coordination (Lopes et al., 2006). From the perspective of training, the key requirement is to transform Emotional intelligence from a “hard-to-grasp” concept into a competence that can be taught–learned–assessed through the program structure linked to outcomes, modules, practicum, and experience.

However, research gaps remain, such as: (i) the lack of Emotional intelligence assessment tools standardized to the digital context and the cultural context of Vietnamese classrooms; (ii) limitations in emotional learning data infrastructure to support real-time feedback; and (iii) the need to develop the competence of teacher educators in design, guided reflection, and the use of emotional data. Addressing these gaps requires synchronized strategies at the program level (outcomes–modules–practicum–assessment), the facilities level (LMS, e-portfolio, secure storage), and the human-resource level (training teacher educators in affective science and coaching methods).

In short, in the digital era, teachers need to be a combination of technological intelligence, emotional intelligence, and humanistic qualities. Emotional intelligence, with the four-branch model and the mechanism of emotion regulation, provides a scientific foundation for designing outcome-based training programs, organizing modules according to the principles of learn–do–reflect, and assessment for progress. When connected with the education sector's digital transformation and professional standards, Emotional intelligence not only increases teaching effectiveness but also contributes to preserving humanity—empathy, responsibility, and fortitude—in an educational ecosystem increasingly mediated by technology.

2. Research Methods

This study is conducted using a qualitative research approach, synthesizing and analyzing documents, combined with a competence-based approach in education, in order to build proposals for developing Emotional intelligence for pre-service teachers in the digital era context. Secondary data were collected and analyzed from seminal works on Emotional intelligence by Mayer and Salovey (1990, 1997), Goleman (1995, 2013), Bar-On (2006), Gross (2015), along with directives of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (2018, 2021) and the National Digital Transformation Program (Government, 2020).

Analysis–synthesis of relevant documents aims to identify the theoretical basis for the structure of Emotional intelligence, its role in teacher education, and at the same time indicate the relationship between Emotional intelligence and teacher professional competency standards. The comparative method is applied to contrast international Emotional intelligence models with Vietnam’s teacher-education context, thereby proposing an emotional competence framework suitable for educational digital transformation. In addition, modeling and generalization methods are used to form solution groups: designing Emotional intelligence learning outcomes, organizing modules according to the learn–do–reflect cycle, and building multi-faceted assessment mechanisms for progress.

The research results are presented in the form of an integrated theoretical model that provides scientific and practical bases for renewing teacher-education programs in Vietnam toward the comprehensive development of socio-emotional competence in the period of digital transformation.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Emotional intelligence

Around the end of the twentieth century, emotional intelligence officially became a concept in academic research, introduced by J. Mayer and P. Salovey: Emotional intelligence is a form of social intelligence related to the ability to monitor the feelings and emotional of oneself and of others; the ability to discriminate among them and use this information to guide human thinking and actions (Salovey et al., 1990). By 1997, Mayer and Salovey revised and presented the concept of Emotional intelligence as follows: Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and express emotionals, to integrate emotionals into thought, to understand and reason about emotional to control and regulate emotional in oneself and in others (Mayer et al., 1997).

Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) defined it in another way: Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize the meanings of emotional and their relationships, on that basis to find causes and ways to solve problems. Emotional intelligence is related to the ability to perceive emotional, to evaluate feelings related to emotional, to clearly understand the information of those emotional, and to control and regulate them (Mayer et al., 1999). We share the view with Mayer and Salovey (1997) that: Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and express emotional, to integrate emotional into thinking to understand and reason about emotionals and to control and regulate emotionals in oneself and in others.

Emotional intelligence is a complex that includes four basic abilities: the ability to perceive emotionals, the ability to use emotionals, the ability to understand emotionals, and the ability to control and regulate emotionals. The components of Emotional intelligence do not exist in isolation but always exist in mutually influential relationships. Among the abilities of

Emotional intelligence, perceiving emotionals in oneself and in those around is the first ability—the foundational ability. This ability has a very important role in that: the subject cannot understand emotionals nor use emotionals to promote action, or control emotionals to serve the maximum interests of life, if he or she cannot recognize emotionals accurately.

Each person's Emotional intelligence can change thanks to practice. This characteristic opens a very important new opportunity for every person: people can actively practice to change their Emotional Intelligence, creating a premise for success in life. This is extremely important for those who work in fields with many human–human relationships in the course of work.

3.2 The Role of Emotional Intelligence for the Individual in the Digital Era

The digital era is placing people in a new context, where digital technology, artificial intelligence (AI), Big Data, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are rapidly developing. These changes not only affect modes of labor and learning but also change models of communication and personality development. In that context, Emotional Intelligence is affirmed by international researchers as a core competence that creates the difference between humans and machines.

3.2.1 Emotional Intelligence helps individuals adapt to the rapid changes of the technological environment

Salovey and Mayer (1990)—the first to propose the concept of Emotional intelligence—argue that this competence includes the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate the emotions of oneself as well as of others. In the digital era, when knowledge and technology change continuously, Emotional intelligence helps individuals remain calm, control stress, and be flexible in adaptation. Gross (1998, 2015) also emphasizes the role of emotion regulation as a psychological protective mechanism, allowing individuals to respond effectively to stressful and uncertain situations.

3.2.2 Emotional Intelligence creates a competitive advantage of humans over machines.

Goleman (1995), in “Emotional Intelligence,” pointed out that career success depends more on Emotional intelligence than IQ. Machines and AI can process data better than humans, but cannot replace empathy, compassion, and the ability to connect emotionally. Bar-On (1997) also developed the EQ model emphasizing elements such as interpersonal relations, social responsibility, empathy—skills that technology cannot replace. In education, especially at early childhood and general education levels, teachers' Emotional intelligence becomes the foundation for building trusting relationships with learners.

3.3.3 Emotional Intelligence creates effectiveness in teamwork in the digital environment.

Lopes and colleagues (2006) demonstrated that Emotional intelligence predicts cooperative effectiveness through the ability to manage conflict, promote support, and social cohesion. In the digital era, where online learning and working groups are increasingly common, Emotional intelligence becomes a decisive factor for maintaining positive interaction and team effectiveness. Emotional intelligence competence is very important for team-working models (Rice, 1999).

3.3.4 Emotional Intelligence helps individuals manage work pressure and digital life.

Bar-On (2006) points out that Emotional intelligence is closely related to mental health and stress tolerance. The development of the digital environment causes people to often face “information overload” and pressure for instant response. People with high Emotional

intelligence know how to maintain emotional balance, establish healthy boundaries between work and life, thereby improving performance and reducing the risk of occupational burnout.

3.3.5 Emotional Intelligence helps individuals promote creativity and innovation.

Research by Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) shows that Emotional intelligence has a close relationship with creativity through maintaining positive emotions and flexible thinking. In the digital era, where creativity is vital, Emotional intelligence helps individuals exploit imaginative potential and propose novel solutions. For teachers, Emotional intelligence also supports the application of technology to teaching, developing creative learning methods that attract children.

3.3.6 Emotional Intelligence helps preserve humanistic values in a technological society.

A common concern in the digital era is the decline of face-to-face communication and humanism in social relations. Goleman (2013) emphasizes the role of “empathy” as the foundation for sustainable relationships, and this is precisely the competence that technology cannot replicate. Emotional intelligence helps people maintain connection, sharing, and humanity, especially in fields like education, where people not only transmit knowledge but also nurture personality and emotions.

Thus, Emotional Intelligence has been demonstrated by many international scholars (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 1997; Gross, 1998; Lopes et al., 2006) to be a foundational factor for personal and social development. In the digital era, Emotional intelligence not only helps individuals adapt, manage emotions, and be creative, but also affirms humanistic identity, maintaining the distinctive role of humans compared with machines. Especially in education, teachers’ Emotional intelligence is a prerequisite condition to nurture confidence, autonomy, and the holistic development of children’s personality—the citizen generation of the 4.0 age.

3.3 Contemporary models and measurement of Emotional Intelligence

Two complementary traditions dominate contemporary EI scholarship. The ability model treats EI as a set of mental abilities for reasoning about emotions and is typically measured with performance-based tests (e.g., MSCEIT). The trait model conceptualizes EI as emotion-related self-perceptions and is measured with questionnaires (e.g., TEIQue). Syntheses elaborate principles and updates of the ability model and chart developments in trait EI theory and evidence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016; Petrides, Mikolajczak, Mavroveli, Sanchez-Ruiz, Furnham, & Pérez-González, 2016).

Psychometric investigations refine these measures. Meta-analytic structural equation modeling supports a higher-order structure for the MSCEIT and fuels debates about the number of underlying ability factors (Fan, Jackson, Yang, Tang, & Zhang, 2010). For trait EI, validations of the TEIQue across languages and populations show good reliability and incremental validity beyond the Big Five (Siegling, Vesely, Petrides, & Saklofske, 2015). Cross-cultural work also indicates acceptable measurement invariance of trait EI (Pérez-Díaz, Petrides, & Furnham, 2022). Short instruments such as the WLEIS demonstrate robust properties in large nonclinical samples (Pacheco et al., 2019).

3.4 Emotional Intelligence and academic performance across levels of schooling

A comprehensive meta-analysis in *Psychological Bulletin* (1,246 effect sizes; $N \approx 42,500$) concluded that EI predicts academic performance ($\rho \approx .20$) and adds incremental variance beyond cognitive ability and personality; effects are strongest for ability EI (MacCann, Jiang,

Brown, Double, Bucich, & Minbashian, 2020). In school settings, trait EI relates to achievement and adaptive classroom behavior (Mavroveli & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011). Complementary meta-analytic evidence indicates that EI predicts job performance in adulthood, reinforcing its relevance for professional trajectories that begin in teacher preparation (Joseph & Newman, 2010; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011).

3.5 Emotional Intelligence, teacher well-being, and classroom processes

Teacher social–emotional competence is tied to classroom quality and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Cluster-randomized trials show that strengthening educators’ emotion skills improves classroom climate: the RULER approach increased emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support across two school years (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2013; Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2013). Mindfulness-based professional development (CARE for Teachers) yielded improvements in teachers’ emotion regulation and well-being and enhanced observed classroom interactions, with effects persisting at follow-up (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Jennings et al., 2019).

3.6 Trainability of emotional intelligence

A growing body of cumulative evidence indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) is trainable, not fixed. Synthesizing randomized and quasi-experimental studies across settings, a meta-analysis in Human Resource Management Review found moderate, reliable improvements in EI following structured interventions delivered to diverse samples (students, educators, and employees), with effects observed across multiple study designs and assessment approaches (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Complementing this, a multilevel meta-analysis in Emotion Review reported consistent pre–post gains and identified design features that amplify impact—most notably programs that target the ability model (perceiving, using, understanding, regulating emotion), provide sufficient dosage (distributed practice over time), and incorporate active learning (guided rehearsal, feedback, and coaching) rather than didactic instruction alone (Hodzic, Scharfen, Ripoll, Holling, & Zenasni, 2018). Together, these reviews counter the criticism that EI training merely shifts self-perceptions: while effects are often larger on self-report indices, improvements have also been documented when programs include performance-based tasks and behaviorally anchored evaluations (Hodzic et al., 2018; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019).

For pre-service teacher education, these findings translate into practical design principles. First, align learning objectives explicitly with the four-branch ability framework and map them to observable classroom behaviors (e.g., accurate affect sensing, empathic responding, and context-appropriate regulation). Second, embed EI development in a learn–do–reflect sequence—case analysis and micro-lectures (learn), role-play and video-supported micro-teaching with feedback (do), and structured reflection with coaching (reflect). Third, ensure assessment for growth by combining validated questionnaires and/or performance tasks with rubrics that capture changes in pedagogical communication, de-escalation, and collaborative problem-solving. Finally, plan for durability—space practice across the semester, schedule booster activities during practicum, and evaluate transfer to authentic teaching outcomes, which meta-analytic evidence links to downstream academic and performance indicators (MacCann et al., 2020; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). In short, when EI training is ability-focused, practice-rich, and longitudinal, measurable gains are achievable and educationally meaningful (Hodzic et al., 2018; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019).

4. Result

4.1 Emotional Intelligence—An Important Competency of Vietnamese Teachers in the Digital Era

Education is a distinctive field of activity aimed at training learners to become people with comprehensively developed personalities. When working in education, teachers perform many different tasks and participate in many diverse and rich human–human relationships: relationships between teachers and learners, between teachers and managers, teacher–teacher relationships, teacher–parent relationships, and between teachers and social organizations and communities. These relationships have their own requirements and demands regarding professional competence and interpersonal communication competence for teachers. The diversity in activities and in communication relationships creates certain pressures on teachers (Dorman, 2003). Thanks to Emotional intelligence competence, teachers are able to identify their own emotions and those of others; to empathize with others’ emotions during interaction and communication. On that basis, they control and regulate their own and others’ EMOTIONS appropriately to circumstances and practical situations to well accomplish assigned tasks and meet society’s expectations.

For pre-service teachers—the future teachers in the digital era— Emotional intelligence is even more particularly important, exerting great influence on organizing educational activities in two directions: promoting the effectiveness of the educational process or constraining the effectiveness of that process. For pre-service teachers to meet future professional requirements, beyond mandatory requirements for professional level, they need to have competences belonging to Emotional intelligence. In their role as organizers implementing educational tasks, each teacher needs to have developed Emotional intelligence.

In the context of developing artificial intelligence, training pre-service teachers in Vietnam is facing new requirements. Alongside disciplinary knowledge and technological skills, Emotional Intelligence becomes one of the core competences that helps pre-service teachers develop themselves and meet teacher professional standards in the digital era.

4.1.1 Managing emotions in learning and professional practice

According to Gross (2015), emotion regulation is a decisive factor for individuals to maintain performance in high-pressure environments. Pre-service teachers—the future teachers—often face stress from study load, teaching practicum, and social expectations. Emotional intelligence helps them manage anxiety and maintain a positive attitude, thereby forming firm professional fortitude. When they perceive their own emotionals well, students (SV) will be able to anticipate actions caused by which emotionals and from there provide orientations to adjust their behavior. Intelligence and subtlety in handling one’s own EMOTIONS will help students complete the task of being a guide, an organizer, a support and scaffold for learners in later educational processes.

4.1.2 Developing pedagogical communication skills

Salovey and Mayer (1990) state that Emotional intelligence includes the ability to recognize and understand others’ emotions. For pre-service teachers, this skill helps them establish positive relationships with learners, parents, and colleagues right from the practicum stage. Goleman (1995) also emphasizes that emotion-rich communication is the foundation for building trust—a prerequisite in teaching. Along with that, when they become teachers, they will be able to recognize, understand, and empathize with learners’ emotionals. A teacher who perceives learners’ emotionals well will not only become a friend to the learner, helping the

learner to share easily, but from there also find measures to stimulate active learner participation. In teachers' activities there are also relationships with colleagues and with parents. The combination between family, school, and society will make educational outcomes better. Therefore, students need to practice—cultivate the competence to handle those relationships well in the work of care—education of learners. Pre-service teachers who do not perceive their own emotions well, especially negative emotions, will not be aware of actions corresponding to those emotions, and when organizing educational activities, unforeseen incidents such as lack of concentration, mischievousness, or disruption from learners may occur—easily leading to negative EMOTIONS such as sadness, anger, loss of emotional control: scolding, punishing, hitting, or overreacting toward learners.

4.1.3 Adapting to the digital environment and lifelong learning

The 4.0 era requires pre-service teachers not only to be proficient in technology but also to be emotionally flexible to adapt to continuous change. Lopes et al. (2006) demonstrate that high Emotional intelligence helps individuals maintain cooperation and creativity in online teamwork environments. This is especially important when pre-service teachers participate in digitized classes, teach online, or conduct educational research using technological tools.

4.1.4 Enhancing creativity in teaching

Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) affirm that positive emotions stimulate creativity. Pre-service teachers with high Emotional intelligence will know how to harness this emotional source to design creative lessons, using technology flexibly to create interest for children. This helps them quickly integrate with the “smart education” trend in the digital era.

4.1.5 Fostering professional qualities and teacher ethics

Bar-On (1997) argues that Emotional intelligence is closely related to social responsibility and humanistic values. In teacher training, Emotional intelligence helps students form attitudes of empathy, patience, and kindness—core qualities of the teacher. This is a key factor for pre-service teachers not only to “know how to teach” but also to “know how to edify” and “know how to accompany” students.

4.1.6 Preparing for the role of a “guide” in the digital society

Goleman (2013) emphasizes that in the context of globalization, successful leaders do not rely only on cognitive intelligence (IQ) but mainly on Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Pre-service teachers—the future teachers—need Emotional intelligence to become classroom leaders and at the same time agents who spread learning inspiration in the knowledge society.

4.2 Some solutions to develop Emotional Intelligence for pre-service teachers in Vietnam in the digital era

4.2.1 Determining objectives

In the context of digital transformation in education, training Emotional Intelligence needs to be regarded as a core component of teachers' professional competence, linked to current standards and digital transformation programs. According to the professional standards for teachers in general education institutions (issued with Circular 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT), requirements are indicated for qualities, pedagogical communication, cooperation with parents—school—community, along with the ability to self-learn and self-develop (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). The education sector's digital transformation program to 2025, with orientation to 2030, emphasizes developing teachers' digital competence, innovating teaching—learning methods, and managing professional data (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). At the national level, Decision 749/QĐ-TTg approving the National Digital

Transformation Program sets the goal of developing digital citizens and a workforce adaptive to technology, in which the education sector is a priority field (Government, 2020).

Research on Emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2006) emphasizes four core competence groups: perceiving, using, understanding, and regulating emotions; as well as the “touchpoints” for Emotional intelligence training in Educational Psychology, Pedagogical Skills, teaching practicum, and professional experience—the solution design needs both to adhere to standards and to take advantage of digital infrastructure to expand opportunities for practicing emotions in new teaching–learning contexts.

4.2.2 Designing programs according to Emotional Intelligence learning outcomes

Designing Emotional intelligence learning outcomes for teacher-education programs needs to be placed on a solid academic foundation and “anchored” in Vietnam’s professional–digital policy framework. Academically, the source document identifies Emotional intelligence according to Mayer and Salovey’s four-branch competency model, including: (i) perceiving emotion; (ii) using emotion to support thinking; (iii) understanding emotion; and (iv) regulating/controlling emotion; these components do not exist separately but interact with one another, in which perception plays a foundational role for the remaining abilities (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, cited in the source document). Emphasizing the “trainability” and flexibility of Emotional intelligence creates a premise to realize the goal of developing pedagogical competence in pre-service teachers through diverse training touchpoints.

An Emotional intelligence outcome framework integrated with the Professional Standards (TT20/2018). The proposed framework is organized as a matrix linking the four Mayer–Salovey pillars with standards/criteria in the Professional Standards for teachers in general education institutions (TT20/2018). First, “perceiving emotion” corresponds to criteria groups on self-awareness, professional character, and teachers’ psychological well-being; this is the “starting point” because subjects are hardly able to understand, use, or regulate emotion effectively if they cannot recognize them accurately. Second, “using emotion to support thinking” is associated with pedagogical decision-making and organizing learning activities; positive and properly regulated emotional states will support attention, cognitive flexibility, and teachers’ creativity in designing–implementing lessons. Third, “understanding emotion” directly relates to pedagogical communication and cooperation with parents–colleagues, requiring teachers to decode learners’ emotional trajectories through multiple interaction channels (face-to-face and digital) to select appropriate feedback strategies. Fourth, “regulating emotion” is mapped to classroom management, situational response, and conflict prevention; this is a condition to maintain professional performance under high pressure, especially when the teaching practicum as a “practical laboratory” continuously places pre-service teachers in diverse situations requiring calmness, patience, empathy, and the ability to encourage students. This mapping ensures consistency between Emotional intelligence and the goal of “training a teaching workforce that meets professional standards in the digital era,” as concluded in the source document.

Outcomes by levels, based on observable behavior. To track progress, Emotional intelligence learning outcomes should be described according to competence bands Foundation → Developing → Proficient → Advanced, accompanied by observable behaviors in both face-to-face and online contexts. At the Foundation level, pre-service teachers show the ability to recognize basic emotional signals of themselves and learners; in the digital environment, they begin to pay attention to response latency, participation frequency, “camera-off” behavior, and tone on LMS forums. At the Developing level, pre-service teachers know how to use some

basic techniques to support thinking and reduce impulsive reactions, such as creating a “pause” when encountering technological incidents, and paraphrasing to confirm emotions in emails/messages with parents–students. At the Proficient level, pre-service teachers understand emotional trajectories (for example, a sequence of frustration → avoidance → outburst in digital space) and proactively select appropriate regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal, delaying feedback, “I-message”) to restore classroom psychological safety. At the Advanced level, pre-service teachers can maintain emotional stability when handling complex conflicts, conduct peer coaching on emotion regulation, and integrate emotional reflection into lesson design–assessment. The behavior-based description not only aligns with the view that Emotional intelligence is a competence that can be trained—changing over time—but also adapts to the nature of teaching practice: where pre-service teachers continuously receive feedback from lecturers and mentor teachers to adjust emotion-regulation skills.

Ensuring compatibility with the digital transformation program. Emotional intelligence learning outcomes need to be linked with the digital transformation modules identified by the education sector to 2025, orientation to 2030, including psychological safety online, emotional communication via digital platforms, digital ethics, and teachers’ culture of conduct on the internet (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2021). Specifically, the program should: (a) stipulate “response rules” in digital channels (timing, tone, protecting learners’ dignity); (b) implement periodic “mood check-in” tools for pre-service teachers to self-monitor emotional states and reflect; (c) use e-portfolios to store evidence of Emotional intelligence progress (teaching videos, emotion journals, peer–lecturer feedback); and (d) promulgate policies on the confidentiality–storage of emotional reflective data consistent with the sector’s digital transformation orientation. This embedding helps ensure that Emotional intelligence is not an “add-on” but a core element of digital pedagogical competence, thereby contributing to forming a teacher workforce “knowledgeable, humanistic, empathetic, and able to accompany students.”

In summary, the outcome-based approach—linking the Emotional intelligence matrix with the Professional Standards (TT20/2018), interpreting it into observable behavior levels, and connecting it with digital transformation—allows schools of education to turn Emotional intelligence into a competence that can be taught, learned, and assessed. This aligns with current policy orientations in Vietnam and meets practical needs for a teaching workforce with firm emotional competence to teach effectively in a digital ecosystem (MoET, 2018, 2021).

4.2.3 Organizing modules according to the principle of “learn–do–reflect”

Organizing modules to develop Emotional intelligence for pre-service teachers needs to be consistent with the logic of competence formation: first equipping theoretical–cognitive foundations (learn), then creating opportunities for practice in socially rich, profession-like contexts (do), and finally a guided reflection mechanism to transform experience into understanding and professional habits (reflect). The “learn–do–reflect” structure not only suits the competence-based approach but also matches the Emotional intelligence training “touchpoints” identified by the source document: Educational Psychology, Pedagogical Skills, teaching practice–practicum, and professional experience activities.

Educational Psychology module (EI foundation). At the “learn” layer, the central goal is to build conceptual knowledge and awareness of emotional mechanisms. First, strengthen case-based learning with typical cases reflecting diverse emotional contexts: face-to-face, online, and hybrid. Case analysis orients pre-service teachers to three axes: recognizing emotional signals (verbal–nonverbal; participation behaviors on digital platforms), detecting cognitive

biases when interpreting learners' states, and choosing–justifying appropriate regulation mechanisms (referencing contemporary emotion-regulation theory; see Gross, 2015). Second, implement weekly self-awareness journals using the ABC frame (Antecedent–Belief–Consequence). The journal combines a short self-rating scale, prompts for observation drawn from Emotional intelligence models introduced in the module, helping pre-service teachers track personal progress over time and provide raw data for guided reflection. Third, arrange micro-lectures on affective science: the neuroendocrine basis of emotional responses; the relationship between information overload in digital environments and emotional fluctuation of teachers, thereby helping pre-service teachers explain why emotional states directly affect attention, memory, and pedagogical decision-making. The content of Educational Psychology is the foundation for pre-service teachers to understand the formation–expression–regulation of emotions and the effects of emotion on learning and communication behaviors.

Pedagogical Skills module (EI practice). At the “do” layer, pre-service teachers need to be placed in controlled professional tasks to practice core socio-emotional skills. First, use role-play and simulation extensively to model teacher–student–parent dialogues in digital situations: connection interruptions, conflicts in online classes, negative feedback on LMS. The focus of the scenarios is active listening, summarizing emotions, aligning expectations, and choosing response language that minimizes escalation. Second, organize group “social problem-solving” projects for pre-service teachers to design and test options for handling conflicts in digital classes, adhering to principles of non-violence and preserving students’ “digital dignity.” Third, require systematic practice of emotion-regulation techniques: cognitive reappraisal, response delay, a “90-second pause” before replying to triggering comments, and using I-messages to take responsibility for one’s emotions instead of attributing blame. In the spirit of the source document, the Pedagogical Skills module is an “ideal environment” for pre-service teachers to train communication, listening, teamwork, conflict resolution, and emotion regulation in socio-professional contexts.

Teaching practicum (applying EI in reality). At the “reflect” layer, the teaching practicum needs to be designed as a sequence of short learning–action–reflection cycles (micro-cycles). First, the program develops a shared Emotional intelligence observation rubric for university supervisors and school mentor teachers, with diverse sources of evidence: practicum journals, self-assessment forms, peer feedback, and teaching video clips. The rubric should describe observable behavior following the four Emotional intelligence pillars (Mayer & Salovey) and professional demands related to communication, classroom management, and situational handling. Next, implement micro-coaching after each lesson; pre-service teachers use the “What – So what – Now what” reflection frame to name emotional triggers, analyze pedagogical consequences, and plan adjustments for the next lesson. The entire process is supported by a digital environment: LMS/e-portfolio stores videos, emotion journals, and multi-source feedback in real time, creating an “emotional learning trace” for progress assessment and program improvement.

Professional–community experiences (expanding socio-emotional capital). In addition to learning and training at the university and practicum schools, professional experience activities play a role in expanding the “socio-emotional capital” of pre-service teachers. On digital platforms, community service projects (service-learning)—such as online reading classes and study counseling for struggling students—create conditions for pre-service teachers to practice empathy, social responsibility, and emotion management in the face of diverse feedback from learners and parents. In parallel, an “Affective Science” club maintains regular workshops on mindfulness, nonviolent communication, and exam-stress management; practicing teachers are

invited to share “difficult cases” and emotion-regulation strategies proven in practice. These components are consistent with the document’s orientation: integrating Emotional intelligence training into psychology modules, skills/professional modules, practicum, and experiential activities to train teachers who are both strong in disciplinary knowledge and rich in humanity, able to understand and accompany students in the digital era.

Overall, the four components above show a consistent program architecture: (i) foundational knowledge to understand the mechanism–function of emotions; (ii) controlled practice for “safe trial-and-error” and receiving feedback; (iii) structured reflection to transform experience into sustainable competence; and (iv) expanding the field of social interaction to cultivate professional emotions. This organization closely follows recommendations of Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training and strengthens the goal of training a teacher workforce that meets standards in the educational context of the digital era.

4.2.4 Teaching methods and technologies supporting Emotional intelligence

Training Emotional intelligence for pre-service teachers requires a pedagogical design that combines experiential learning methods with digital infrastructure, to transform emotions from “elusive content” into objects that can be observed, practiced, and assessed. Integrate Emotional intelligence training into psychology modules, pedagogical skills, practicum, and professional experiences in the context of digital education, thereby forming a teacher workforce “rich in emotion and humanity” that meets professional standards (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2018, 2021).

Digital case-based learning. Build a repository reflecting emotionally specific challenges of online and AI-mediated teaching, such as prolonged silence in virtual classrooms, “camera off,” conflicts on forums, or pressure for continuous message responses. Each case comes with a set of standardized questions: what are the dominant emotions/needs, what observable evidence supports that interpretation, which regulation options are feasible, and what pedagogical consequences are expected. This approach follows the document’s orientation regarding role-play, situational games, and group projects as ideal environments to train listening, empathy, and conflict resolution—skills closely tied to Emotional intelligence, especially in digital space (Lopes et al., 2006).

Emotional reflection tools. Two key tools are the self-awareness journal and the e-portfolio. The journal using the ABC frame (Antecedent–Belief–Consequence) helps pre-service teachers track emotional triggers, intermediary beliefs, and consequential behaviors, thereby practicing cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 2015). The e-portfolio plays the role of an Emotional intelligence progress map (timeline) linking evidence (lesson videos, feedback from lecturers/peers, learning products) to transform fragmented reflection into verifiable progress—a concretization of the document’s recommendation to embed Emotional intelligence training in psychology and practice modules.

Video analysis—emotion-focused micro-teaching. Record moment-to-moment interactions and use the “freeze-frame” technique to allow pre-service teachers to recognize nonverbal signals, response latency, and the quality of empathic questions; then compare observations with learners’ perceptions to adjust regulation strategies. This approach leverages the role of practicum as a “practical laboratory” for verifying Emotional intelligence and the role of feedback from lecturers/mentor teachers in adjusting emotional skills.

Practicing the “digital well-being ecosystem.” Due to multi-channel response requirements and a high pace of interaction in digital transformation, pre-service teachers need professional conventions: response time frames, notification thresholds, a “25 minutes focus – 5 minutes break” cycle, and the principle of delaying response when emotional intensity is high (>7/10) to reduce impulsive reactions (Gross, 2015). These practices align with the sector’s digital transformation orientation—where digital competence must go hand in hand with safety, ethics, and teachers’ digital culture.

“Difficult-response” exercises. Simulated letters/messages from parents or students with tense tones are used for pre-service teachers to write two versions of responses: (1) the instinctive version and (2) the version after cognitive reappraisal, using I-messages and empathic listening techniques. Comparing the two versions helps pre-service teachers clearly see the impact of regulation on trust and school–family pedagogical relations—an element emphasized by the document as a foundation of school–family–society interaction and educational effectiveness (Goleman, 1995).

Overall, the combination of digital cases–evidence-based reflection–video analysis–digital well-being–response drills forms a data-informed emotional learning cycle, consistent with the goal of training teachers with strong emotional competence in the digital transformation era (MoET, 2021).

4.2.5 Assessing Emotional intelligence: multi-faceted, evidenced, and progress-oriented principles

Assessment of Emotional Intelligence in teacher education needs to be based on three principles: (i) multi-faceted, combining multiple sources and situations; (ii) evidenced, referencing observable behaviors; and (iii) for progress, tracking change over time. The conceptual foundation is the Mayer–Salovey four-branch model (perceiving, using, understanding, and regulating emotions), viewing emotion regulation as the central mechanism helping maintain professional performance under pressure (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Gross, 2015). This approach also aligns with the source document’s orientation of integrating Emotional intelligence into program components to train teachers who meet standards in the digital era.

Standardized assessment—behavior illustration. Build a behavior rubric for Emotional intelligence based on the four pillars, describing observable indicators in face-to-face and online classrooms (for example: asking open questions; affect-confirming responses; adjusting voice–speed–pauses; maintaining positive discipline). The rubric helps “make Emotional intelligence visible” as verifiable scoring criteria and connects with the specifics of the digital environment highlighted by the document. In addition, short scenario-based assessment stations (pedagogical OSTE/OSPE) with actors playing students/parents and standardized criteria can be organized to check the ability to recognize–regulate emotions and resolve conflicts within time limits; this approach inherits the spirit of “practice–simulation” proposed in the document.

Multi-source assessment. Combine self-assessment ↔ peer ↔ lecturer ↔ mentor teacher and, when appropriate, student/parent opinions (with confidentiality). Multi-source feedback fully reflects the candidate’s socio-emotional imprint in professional interactions and encourages self-adjustment, aligning with the document’s assertion that practicum is a “practical laboratory” where feedback from lecturers/mentor teachers plays a decisive role.

Assessment for progress. Instead of “one-time” testing, use a baseline → midterm → final cycle and require learners to present evidence of progress (videos of key interaction moments, emotion-learning journals, peer–lecturer feedback), tied to an Individual Development Plan (IDP). This progressive approach aligns with the view in the document about the trainability of Emotional intelligence through repeated practice and feedback.

Outcomes linked to professional standards. Emotional intelligence assessment results need to be connected to the graduation portfolio and serve as a basis for recommendations for post-graduation professional development, creating a bridge to in-service professional development according to the Teacher Professional Standards (TT20/2018). This is consistent with the document’s conclusion on the goal of training a workforce that “meets professional standards” in the context of digital education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

5. Conclusion

In the context of digital transformation and the rapid development of artificial intelligence, Emotional intelligence increasingly demonstrates a foundational role in training pre-service teachers—the future teachers of Vietnam’s education. Emotional intelligence not only helps pre-service teachers recognize, understand, and regulate their own emotions, but also supports them in building pedagogical communication skills, managing stress, maintaining emotional balance, and flexibly adapting to the digital environment (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Gross, 2015). In addition, developed emotional competence contributes to forming humanistic qualities, empathy, and social responsibility—core elements that create the fortitude and professional ethics of teachers (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2006).

To meet the requirements of Vietnam’s Professional Standards for Teachers (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018) and the objectives of the Digital Transformation Program of Vietnam’s education sector (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021), schools of education need to integrate Emotional intelligence training as a mandatory component in curricula. Embedding Emotional intelligence into psychology modules, professional skills, teaching practicum, and experiential activities not only helps students practice emotion regulation, effective communication, and teamwork, but also prepares them with adaptability, creativity, and humanity in the digital educational environment.

Thus, developing Emotional Intelligence is the key to forming a generation of Vietnamese teachers who are “both strong in expertise, firm in digital competence, and rich in emotion and character,” meeting the demands of educational reform in the digital era (Government of Vietnam, 2020)

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