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## Assessing psychological image of the ideal teacher and real teacher among pedagogical students with semantic differential

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**Abstract.** The present study aims to provide observational evidence on the differences of perception of the ideal and real teachers among 1-year and final-year students. Although numerous studies have delved into students' general attitudes towards teachers, research specifically focusing on real and ideal images using Osgood's semantic differential method towards teachers remains scarce. After completing the translation and adaptation processes, the inventory was distributed to a total of 75 (10 males, 65 females) first year and final year undergraduate students majoring in Pedagogy and Psychology across the university in Astana, Kazakhstan. Of these, 50 were first-year students and 25 were final-year students.

A factor analysis was carried out to investigate and compare the factors across semantic differential scales of chosen 19 bipolar adjectives. Based on the descriptive factor analyses (SPSS), it was evident that the students of both categories perceived the image of real and ideal teachers differently in terms of their expectations, heightened emotional resonance, importance of communication competences and evaluation. The result of the study can be used for curriculum development and teaching practices, where it is of great importance to investigate both students' and teacher's perception of the teaching-learning process.

**Key words:** semantic differential method, future specialists, factorial analysis, self-image, bipolar scales.

## Introduction

The declining interest of young people in pursuing teaching careers in Kazakhstan is driven by various factors. Research shows that higher moral goals and non-material values, such as contributing to society and influencing youth development, play a significant role in choosing the teaching profession [6]. Furthermore, the low pay in the education sector contributes to the lack of popularity of teaching among the youth, resulting in high turnover rates and difficulties in retaining qualified teachers [7]. Additionally, the overall trend of educational and labor migration of young people in Kazakhstan impacts the nation's human capital quality and socio-economic situation, potentially steering talent away from teaching careers[8]. To tackle these challenges, enhancing incentives and fostering accurate perceptions of the teaching profession are essential prerequisites for making conscious career decisions. Considering individuals' interests, aspirations, and abilities could help reverse the declining trend of young people choosing teaching careers in Kazakhstan.

The self-perception of professional teachers among education students is shaped by several factors, including the dynamics of the educational environment, proficiency with information and communication technology, and personal motivations for self-improvement [1]. Teachers in the modern educational process may experience a professional identity crisis, which involves changes in the meanings of their activities, uncertainty about their professional future, and a lack of self-actualization [2]. The process of professional self-determination in pedagogical students is shaped by their unique educational paths and includes planning their professional future, actively pursuing it, and reflection on their experiences [3]. Developing professional self-concepts is essential for future teachers, as it embodies their active engagement in self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-enhancement in their careers [4]. The self-concept of a teacher includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, and is shaped by how the individual sees and evaluates themselves in the present, past, ideal, and reflective perspectives [5].

Adequate ideas about the profession are a necessary condition for the conscious choice of a subject's work activity, taking into account his interests, desires, capabilities and abilities. At the current stage of societal development, there is an increasing emphasis on the role of training competent specialists who possess well-developed professional knowledge and skills. The formation of a professional's identity is successfully carried out only if, in the course of training, a system of adequate professional ideas is formed that participate in the formation of a person's life plans, organize and guide her activity, give her a qualitative originality, a unique individual and social appearance.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the difference of perceptions of real and ideal teachers among first-year and final-year undergraduate pedagogical students. Such investigation can help us discover the relation of certain characteristics, which negatively or positively influence individual motives for development in the professional sphere. To address this objective, the following research question was posed:

**1. How do pedagogical students' views of the ideal teacher contrast with their views of real teachers?**

## **Literature review**

The Semantic Differential method is used to analyze the image of real and ideal teachers, focusing on the qualities and values attributed to them. Research indicates that the perceived level of linguistic awareness among teachers greatly influences the concepts of an ideal teacher, with key qualities including social, psychophysiological, and moral dimensions [9]. The Semantic Differential scale proves useful in evaluating the characteristics of an ideal teacher, uncovering evaluative and emotional components connected to this concept and confirming its effectiveness in assessing teaching quality [10]. Furthermore, the correlation between teachers' self-perceptions and their perceptions of the ideal student in the classroom emphasizes the importance of similarity between teachers' and students' personalities for successful classroom interaction and learning. These results collectively showcase the diverse perceptions and connotations linked to teachers, influenced by factors such as service usage, cultural beliefs, and societal advancements.

### **Empirical studies on semantics of self-images**

The Semantic Differential (SD) Method, serves as a valuable tool for assessing the semantics of self-images. Impressions are gathered through contrasting Likert scales, enabling this method to effectively capture subjective feelings towards the ideal and real image of teachers. The semantic differential technique was employed in various studies to evaluate the image of teachers. One specific study honed in on resource teachers in Queensland and uncovered a highly positive image among administrators and teachers who made use of their services [11]. Another study delved into the connotative meaning of "Public School Teachers" among college students, pinpointing factors like expressiveness and stability that shape perceptions. Furthermore, an examination of the semantic codes of the teaching profession underscored discrepancies between cultural perceptions and social realities, highlighting low profitability and prestige along with limited growth opportunities [11].

The semantic differential technique has been used in various studies to evaluate the image of teachers. Wittrock et al. explored the connotative meaning of "Public School Teachers" among college students using this approach, pinpointing factors such as expressiveness and stability [12]. In addition, O'Connor and Adie utilized the semantic differential tool to assess the perception of resource teachers, discovering a highly positive outlook among administrators and teachers who engaged with their services. Additionally, Ryaguzova and Chernyaeva investigated the semantic codes associated with the teaching profession, revealing discrepancies between cultural perceptions and societal interpretations of teachers, and highlighting concerns such as low profitability and prestige [13]. To address this relatively underexplored area, researchers have begun applying this method to evaluate and understand perceptions related to teachers.

Although the semantic differential method has been used in several studies to evaluate students' attitudes towards different subjects, such as Chemistry and Radiological Technology, there is a lack of evaluation towards the images of teachers: real and ideal. It is crucial to comprehend students' emotional perceptions and motivations towards educational subjects [14]. Factors like interest, utility, anxiety, emotional satisfaction, and fear play a significant role in influencing student attitudes towards subjects. The development of value-semantic

attitudes towards chosen professions is essential for successful occupational activities and self-improvement. These studies collectively highlight the value of employing the semantic differential method to evaluate and monitor students' attitudes towards teaching. This approach is instrumental in enhancing educational outcomes and boosting student engagement.

### Research methods

This research employs a quantitative approach. The data obtained through the semantic differential method were analyzed mathematically using statistical software such as SPSS 17.0, which aids in revealing underlying characteristics within the subject being studied. These identified characteristics can help explain complex phenomena, especially in solving various scientific and educational problems, particularly those involving comparative pedagogical experiments.



Figure 1. Example of semantic differential scales (Osgood, 1957)

The original semantic differential, which was created and standardized by Osgood and his colleagues in 1957, consists of a total of 50 pairs of bipolar adjectives. The outcomes of their research demonstrated that certain pairs of adjectives have a tendency to form distinct groups (Figure 1).

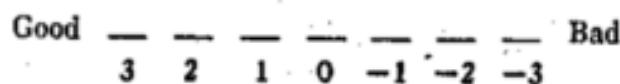


Figure 2. Example of scoring a semantic differential scale (Heise, 1969)

These groups, also known as dimensions or factors, were identified as follows: the first dimension, referred to as the dimension of evaluation, encompassed adjectives such as open – reserved, pleasant – mean, neat – untidy; the second dimension, known as the dimension of potency, involved adjectives such as big – small, heavy – light, strong – weak; and the third dimension, known as the dimension of activity, included adjectives such as responsible – irresponsible, rational – irrational, formal – informal (Figure 2).

The analysis involved categorizing the 19 bipolar scale pairs, such as “nasty\_pleasant” to “stale\_soft”. Each item shows varying levels of loading from each factor. Based on the structure of these relationships within each factor, the characterization is outlined as follows: Factor 1 is labeled as "Professional teacher (“Ideal”)", factor 2 is referred to as "Real teacher", factor

3 is denoted as "Evaluation", and factor 4 is named "Communicative competences". Factors 1 and 2, which represent the perception of professionalism and the actual image of a teacher respectively, encompass both behavioral and partially emotional and cognitive components. Factor 3 is an affective–evaluative component, and factor 4 is the cognitive component of the relationship.

### **Participants and context**

In terms of participation, 75 (10 male and 65 female) students were involved in the empirical investigation, with the objective of examining the specific attributes associated with the portrayal of a professional psychologist amongst students pursuing studies in the pedagogical and psychological field, in comparison to students who do not possess a focused interest in the professional study.

**Table 1**

**The characteristics of participants**

<b>Year of study</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1-year student	32	5	27
4-year student	33	4	29

These participants consisted of first-year and final year students, commonly referred to as "teachers", from Departments of Pedagogy and Psychology during the 2022-2023 academic year. To gather the necessary data, a specialized semantic differential was employed after collecting data from Google Form. To respondents who are unfamiliar with the differential procedure, an example of a simplified form was given so that the participants evaluated only one object.

To achieve stable factorization in later stages of data processing, it is essential that the sample size exceeds three times the number of factorized scales, with an additional 10% to account for reliability. For instance, when utilizing 21 evaluation scales (such as personality differential), approximately 70 respondents should be involved. The collected data was coded, entered into an Excel spreadsheet first, and then moved to the SPSS 17.0 data editor for thorough data analysis.

### **The results**

The survey results were analyzed using factor analysis, a statistical technique that integrates qualitative and structural-quantitative methods to reveal the underlying, latent characteristics of the subject. The factors identified through this analysis can be applied to elucidate complex phenomena and address various scientific and pedagogical issues, particularly within the framework of comparative pedagogical research. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to assess how four factors clustered: professional teacher ("ideal"), real teacher, evaluation and communicative competences.

Table 2 includes component loadings, representing the correlations between the variable and the component. The values range from -1 to +1 due to their correlation nature. By utilizing the /format subcommand. However, in compliance with the request to exclude loadings below 0.5 from the output, areas with low loadings are represented as blanks. It is important to mention that loadings less than 0.5 (< .5) are excluded from the output. This enhances the readability of the output by eliminating insignificant low correlations. Along with ideal and real teachers' components, it is added two more factorial components to see more detailed variance of bipolar adjectives with teaching characteristics "evaluation" and teaching skills "communicative competences". Another reason for using 2 more factorial components is the possibility of getting more accurate data from SPSS, where it is recommended to use more than 2-3 Factors.

**Table 2**

**The results of the factor analysis of images of real and ideal teachers among 1-year students**

<b>Bipolar adjectives</b>	<b>Professional teacher</b>	<b>Real teacher</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Communicative competences</b>
weak_strong	.874			
silent_talkative			.936	
irresponsible_responsible	.922			
stubborn_compliant				.791
reserved_open	.869			
selfish_considerate	.790			
stressed_relaxed			.807	
emotional_rational	.783			
irritable_unperturbed	.930			
unfair_fair	.663			
informal_formal	.817			
ugly_beautiful	.548			
heavy_light	.914			
cold_warm	.791	.530		
loud_quiet	.781	.556		
restless_calm		.671		
rough_gentle	.907			
stable_soft	.747			

**Research question 1: How do pedagogical students' perceptions of the ideal teacher differ from their perceptions of real teachers?**

Following the quantitative research, we identified differences in students' perceptions of the ideal versus real teacher. As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, both first-year and final-year students rate the ideal teacher significantly higher (above 0.5) than their perception of the real teacher: 'warm' (0.530), 'quiet' (0.556) and 'calm' (0.671) for Factor 2 among 1-year students; 'cold' (-0.233), 'quiet' (0.645), and 'calm' (0.534) for Factor 2 among 4-year students. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that 15 out of 19 bipolar scale categories are associated with the first factorial component, which represents the professional ("ideal") teacher. These categories include: 'pleasant', 'strong', 'responsible', 'open', 'considerate', 'rational', 'unperturbed', 'fair', 'formal', 'beautiful', 'light', 'warm', 'quiet', 'gentle', and 'soft'. In contrast, for the second variable, the real teacher, first-year students linked this concept to three bipolar adjectives: 'warm', 'quiet' and 'calm'.

**Table 3**

**The results of the factor analysis of images of real and ideal teachers among 4-year students**

<b>Bipolar adjectives</b>	<b>Professional teacher</b>	<b>Real teacher</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Communicative competences</b>
nasty_pleasant	.723			
weak_strong	.923			
silent_talkative			.835	
irresponsible_responsible	.933			
stubborn_compliant				.782
reserved_open	.723			
selfish_considerate	.802			
stressed_relaxed			.634	
emotional_rational	.734			
irritable_unperturbed	.930			
unfair_fair	.734			
informal_formal	.987			
ugly_beautiful	.233			
heavy_light	.645			
cold_warm	.723	-.233		
loud_quiet	.781	.645		
restless_calm		.534		
rough_gentle	-.243			
stable_soft	.834			

According to table 3, the results of the factor analysis of images of real and ideal teachers among 4-year students differ in terms of bipolar scales, showing opposite adjectives describing the images of ideal and real teachers. As can be seen from the Factor 1, 2, the bipolar adjectives used were the same with the results given in Table 2, except for differences in sums, specifically ‘rough’ (-.243) and ‘cold’ (-.233).

**Table 4**

**The results of Principal Component Analysis of 4 factors: (1) professional teacher “ideal”; (2) real teacher; (3) evaluation; (4) communicative competences**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of ariance	cumu-lative %	Total	% of ariance	cumu-lative %	Total	% of ariance	cumu-lative %
Professional teacher	12.168	45.068	45.068	12.168	45.068	45.068	9.215	34.128	34.128
Real teacher	4.606	17.058	62.126	4.606	17.058	62.126	7.270	26.925	61.053
Evaluation	4.321	16.005	78.131	4.321	16.005	78.131	4.312	15.970	77.023
Communi-cative competences	3.456	12.799	90.930	3.456	12.799	90.930	3.437	12.730	89.753

Table 4 presents the eigenvalues under “initial eigenvalues” representing the variances associated with each factor. In the following sub-columns, these variances are expressed as both a percentage and as the cumulative percentage of variance explained by the factors. The “Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings” section highlights the two retained factors, detailing their common variance through eigenvalues, percentage, and cumulative percentage. In the “Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings” columns, the distribution of variance across the two factors after rotation is shown, which helps refine the factor structure. The analysis of cumulative variance in the two-factor model reveals a total of approximately 61%, which is deemed an adequate value for explaining the variance.

According to table 4, it presents the allocation of variance among the 4 potential factors. The unrotated factor model asserts the existence of two factor components that meet the eigenvalue criterion. In factor analysis, tables displaying total explained variance serve as crucial indicators of the significant factors present [15]. It is important to note that these factors have eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which is a commonly accepted standard for assessing their relevance. Factors with eigenvalues below 1.0 provide less explanatory power than a single item would. Consequently, if no specifications were given, the computer would seek the optimal solution by rotating four factors. The table 4 reveals that there exist two components possessing initial Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first component constitutes 45.068% of the entire variance, nevertheless, given that it is less than 50%, it is advisable to rotate more than one component.



## **Discussion**

The results of factor analysis are often insightful for qualitative analysis, however, it is important to recognize that the researcher, with a deep understanding of the stimulus and anticipated outcomes, usually assigns the names to the factors.

To minimize subjectivity, one can task an independent specialist with processing the results matrix and a group of independent experts with selecting generalizing factor names. Despite its drawbacks, factor analysis is widely used for data reduction because it helps in approaching integrated data structures based on multiple stimulus evaluation scales. In essence, factor analysis unveils the hidden structure of large data matrices that are not apparent to the experimenter. It is believed that these factors highlight the significant categories or scales for a group of subjects evaluating specific stimuli.

Factor analysis results reveal a discrepancy between the idealized image of a professional teacher and the actual image encountered during the learning process. The findings from the factor analysis suggest a natural evolution in perception towards the ideal professional teacher throughout the educational journey. In their first year, they think a professional teacher is someone who is needed, brings variety to lessons, is interesting, and plays an important role in society. Notably, freshmen exhibit similar proportions in these perceptions, reflecting a stage where adaptation to university dynamics is still underway. Consequently, new insights, achievements, and setbacks in navigating teaching experiences are perceived with heightened emotional resonance compared to other cohorts.

Despite being in the early stages of their academic studies, respondents point to a significant gap between the theoretical material presented and its practical relevance, as reflected in the high factor loadings for theoretical variables. Factor analysis results demonstrate that by the fourth year, students experience a slight change in how they perceive professional teachers. While it is acknowledged a disparity between the idealized image of a professional teacher and the real one, they find the real image to be unappealing, unwelcoming, tedious and lacking in the ability to bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications (as evidenced by factor loadings for certain variables falling below 0.5).

According to Table 1 and Table 2, having experienced teaching firsthand during their third and fourth year, graduates come to appreciate the importance of communication skills (as indicated by high values for specific variables). While the term ('irritable\_unperturbed') is used as the primary factor by students in their first year to describe professional teachers, the term ('irresponsible\_responsible') portrays that image by fourth-year students. It is also worth mentioning that in previous studies the image of teachers and subjects took into account the gender differences of participants. The current study did not find any gender differences in how teachers' images were perceived. Existing research on the relationship between gender and attitudes offers varied, often inconsistent, and complex findings.

As they near the completion of their studies, graduates no longer harbor the overtly negative attitude towards professional teachers. However, they still perceive the real-life depiction of teachers as unwelcoming, challenging, lacking the developmental opportunities, and disconnected from practical realities.

## Conclusion

The assessment of the real and ideal image of teachers using the Semantic Differential (SD) method is essential. Research has proven that SD effectively identifies attributes of the 'ideal teacher' and uncovers evaluative, emotional, and affective components linked to this concept. It is crucial to understand the social representations of teachers and their roles, emphasizing the diversity in teachers' perceptions of their ideal roles compared to their actual practices [16]. The educational phenomenon's complexity results in varied images of what constitutes an ideal educator, often influenced by unrealistic portrayals in media and popular culture. Overall, utilizing semantic differential to assess the image of real and ideal teachers is a valuable tool in comprehending the multifaceted nature of teaching quality and teacher perceptions.

In addressing our research question, we identified a difference in how first-year and fourth-year students perceive ideal and real teachers:

a) first-year students strongly believe that an ideal teacher plays a vital role, enriches lessons with variety, engages students effectively, and holds an important place in society.

b) 1-year students perceive new insights, achievements, and setbacks in navigating teaching experiences are perceived with heightened emotional resonance compared to other cohorts.

c) for senior students the real image must be unappealing, unwelcoming, tedious, and must lack the ability to bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications, as indicated by factor loadings for certain variables falling below 0.5;

d) 1-year students recognize the significance of communication skills and evaluation, as shown by the high values for specific variables.

Moreover, as for the similarities found in the research, respondents of both categories clearly show a significant gap between the theoretical concepts taught and their actual practical usefulness, as demonstrated by the high factor loading values for theoretical variables.

In future research, it is essential to prioritize teachers' goals, alongside the curriculum, with an emphasis not only on students' cognitive development but also on their emotional engagement. Creating teaching strategies and curricula that focus on enhancing students' attitudes could greatly increase their chances of success. Additionally, addressing affective factors may help counteract the troubling decline in students' interest in pursuing teaching careers.

## Contribution of the authors

When writing the research paper, the contributions of the authors were equal.

**Ishkibayeva M.M.** – conceived the research idea, collected data, made a statistical spreadsheet, created tables and diagrams, wrote results based on feedback.

**Abdykhalykova Zh.Y.** – designed the methodology, revised data, verified correctness, participated in writing the results and discussion sections, and approved of the final draft of the article for publication.

**Kabylzhanova B.K.** – collected the statistical data, designed google spreadsheet, carried out the experimental surveys with students.

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### **Семантикалық дифференциал арқылы студент-мұғалімдер арасында идеалды және нақты мұғалімнің бейнесін бағалау**

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл зерттеу 1 курс студенттері мен соңғы курс студенттері арасында идеалды және нақты мұғалімдерді қабылдаудағы айырмашылықтың бақылаушы дәлелдерін ұсынуға бағытталған. Көптеген зерттеулер оқушылардың мұғалімдерге деген жалпы көзқарасын зерттегенімен, Осгудтың мұғалімдерге қатысты семантикалық дифференциалды әдісін қолдана отырып, нақты және идеалды бейнелерге арнайы бағытталған зерттеулер тапшы болып қала береді.

Аударма және бейімдеу процестерін аяқтағаннан кейін Астана қаласындағы университеттер бойынша Педагогика және психология мамандығының бірінші және соңғы курс студенттеріне барлығы 75 (10 ер, 65 әйел) таратылды.

Таңдалған 19 биполярлық сын есімнің семантикалық дифференциалды шкалалары бойынша факторларды зерттеу және салыстыру үшін факторлық талдау жүргізілді. Сипаттамалық факторлық талдауларға (SPSS) сүйене отырып, екі санаттағы студенттер де нақты және идеалды мұғалімдердің имиджін олардың үміттері, эмоционалды резонансының жоғарылауы, коммуникативті құзыреттіліктің маңыздылығы және бағалау тұрғысынан әр түрлі қабылдағаны анықталды.

Зерттеу нәтижесін оқу бағдарламаларын әзірлеу және оқыту практикасы үшін пайдалануға болады, мұнда оқушылардың да, мұғалімнің де оқу-тәрбие процесін қабылдауын зерттеудің маңызы зор.

**Түйін сөздер:** семантикалық дифференциал әдісі, болашақ мамандар, факторлық талдау, өзін-өзі бағалау, биполярлық шкалалар.

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### **Оценка психологического портрета идеального и реального учителя среди студентов-педагогов с семантическим дифференциалом**

**Аннотация.** Цель настоящего исследования - предоставить наблюдательные данные о различиях в восприятии идеальных и реальных учителей студентами первого и выпускного курсов. Несмотря на многочисленные исследования, посвященные общему отношению учащихся к учителям, исследований, специально посвященных реальным и идеальным образам учителей с использованием метода семантического дифференциала Осгуда, остается мало. После завершения процессов перевода и адаптации перечень был распространен в общей сложности среди 75 (10 мужчин, 65 женщин) студентов первого и последнего курсов бакалавриата, специализирующихся в области педагогики и психологии, по всему университету в Астане, Казахстан.

Был проведен факторный анализ для изучения и сравнения факторов по семантическим дифференциальным шкалам выбранных 19 биполярных прилагательных. Основываясь на описательном факторном анализе (SPSS), пришли к выводу, что учащиеся обеих категорий по-разному воспринимали образ реального и идеального учителей с точки зрения их ожиданий, повышенного эмоционального резонанса, важности коммуникативных компетенций и оценки.

Результаты исследования могут быть использованы при разработке учебных программ и в практике преподавания, где очень важно исследовать восприятие процесса преподавания как учащимися, так и преподавателем.

**Ключевые слова:** метод семантического дифференциала, будущие специалисты, факторный анализ, самооценка, биполярные шкалы.

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