

DESIGNING BEAUTY EDUCATION FOR EMPATHY: CURRICULUM BLUEPRINT FOR EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT NAIL TECHNICIANS

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Abstract. The article focuses on the development of a training program for nail service professionals, emphasizing emotional intelligence and empathy as essential components of professional practice in the beauty industry. The aim of the article is to justify the necessity of including empathy as a core element in the professional training of nail technicians and to design an integrated curriculum that combines technical, emotional, and communication competencies with a strong emphasis on emotional intelligence in the educational process. The study employed general scientific methods of cognition: analysis and synthesis; induction and deduction; modeling; systematization; comparative pedagogical method; and generalization of scientific sources. The research findings show that current educational training for nail service specialists is based on a combination of fundamental scientific disciplines (dermatology, material chemistry, hygiene), practical skills (classic and machine manicure, artistic design), as well as entrepreneurship elements. At the same time, a number of issues were identified, with the most significant being the lack of standardized pedagogical training for instructors and insufficient adaptation of educational content to industry innovations, which complicates the integration of socio-psychological components such as empathy. The study demonstrates that empathy plays a critical role in effective professional interaction within the beauty service sector, particularly in the work of nail service professionals. It develops on three levels – subjective, interpersonal, and objective – and influences a specialist's ability to accurately recognize and interpret clients' emotions, build trusting communication, and enhance satisfaction with the service provided. The proposed curriculum takes these factors into account and includes modules where empathy is integrated through active learning methods: case studies; role-playing; emotionally charged scenario modeling; and reflective practices. Implementing these strategies supports the development of soft skills, including active listening, nonverbal communication, and emotional self-regulation, which are vital components of a professional's competency. The practical significance of the study lies in the creation of a holistic pedagogical model for training emotionally intelligent specialists capable of delivering client-centered, aesthetically thoughtful, and emotionally comfortable services.

Keywords: empathy, emotional intelligence, nail service, pedagogical model, soft skills.

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Introduction

In the current context of educational transformation within the beauty industry, there is a growing interest in exploring not only the technical but also the emotional dimension of professional activity. The issue of training nail service specialists as professionals capable of delivering high-quality procedures while also establishing effective emotional contact with clients is becoming increasingly relevant. At the same time, systemic pedagogical science and educational practices do not sufficiently address the emotional and communicative aspects of professional training in the beauty sector. Most training programs still place emphasis on the development of technical skills, whereas empathy – as a key element of emotional intelligence – remains marginal or entirely excluded from the educational process.

This study identifies empathy as a core professional competence in the field of nail services, which has been largely neglected within the framework of vocational education. Despite the availability of research on soft skills development in pedagogy more broadly, the role of empathy in aesthetic and service-oriented professions has not been analyzed in a systematic way. The research offers a methodological justification for the integration of emotional and communicative components into the training programs for nail service specialists and outlines conceptual foundations for developing empathy in the educational process as a factor of professional effectiveness.

Literature Review

The issue of developing empathy in the professional training of beauty industry specialists, particularly nail service professionals, remains insufficiently covered in scientific literature. A. Bruns and D.G. Pelli [1] have contributed significantly to understanding the connection between empathy, emotions, and aesthetic perception, emphasizing that empathy enhances the emotional impact of perceiving beauty, which is a key element in aesthetic education. A. Clark [3] considers empathy as a fundamental component of the counseling process that directly correlates with interpersonal communication skills among professionals in the service sector. The study by R. Rosmalina and co-authors [9] highlights the influence of empathy, alongside factors such as reliability and the visual aspects of service, on the level of client satisfaction in salon services. The practical aspect of training professionals with a focus on empathy is explored by K.S. Padilla [7], who proposes improved teaching strategies to increase the effectiveness of educators in the beauty field. M. Costa and C. Cipolla [4] stress the importance of developing soft skills, including empathy, as critical for the sustainable development of higher education. Meanwhile, the publication by O. Muzyka and colleagues [6] describes modern trends in aesthetic education where emotional competence is an essential component. Despite the availability of literature on the topic, there is a noticeable lack of systematized material relevant to this research. Therefore, various methods of scientific inquiry were applied to analyze, group, and structure the information in accordance with the focus of the study.

The purpose of this article is to justify the need to incorporate empathy as a key component in the professional training of nail service specialists and to develop an integrated curriculum that combines technical, emotional, and communicative competencies with an emphasis on enhancing emotional intelligence in the educational process.

Research Results

The current state of education in the field of nail services and beauty is characterized by a combination of traditional technical training programs and a growing awareness of the need to improve pedagogical approaches and foster emotional intelligence among professionals. The foundation of education in the nail industry consists of structured training programs that cover a broad spectrum of competencies. The standard nail technology textbook Milady [5]

outlines the key areas of knowledge essential for a successful career and for passing the licensing exam. These areas include

fundamental knowledge, which covers history and career opportunities, life skills, and professional image;

health and safety, principles and practices of infection control, general anatomy and physiology, nail structure, growth, disorders, and diseases;

technical skills such as manicures, pedicures, use of electric files, tip application and wraps, work with monomer liquids and polymer powders, as well as the use of UV and LED gels;

scientific principles including basic chemistry, nail product chemistry, and electricity;

business and professional development, communication for success, job search, workplace experience, and salon management.

Alongside technical training, growing attention is being given to the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Research by K. Padilla [7] reveals a direct link between effective instructional methods and student success. Educators who successfully integrate theory, practical skills, and current industry trends have a significantly positive impact on student outcomes. At the same time, the study identifies several challenges faced by instructors, including

1. limited access to professional development;
2. exclusion of industry trends from curricula;
3. lack of standardized pedagogical training.

This highlights the urgent need for targeted training programs for beauty educators that would address these gaps and equip instructors with the essential industry knowledge and skills required for success [7].

In addition to technical and pedagogical aspects, there is a growing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence in the beauty industry. Beauty professionals often engage in work that is deeply personal for the client, encountering client insecurities on a regular basis. The Hair Professionals Association [11] emphasizes that emotional intelligence is a critical element for navigating the emotional landscape of the beauty industry. This involves both the ability to understand and express one's own emotions clearly and to engage in empathetic listening. The development of emotional intelligence begins with self-awareness, allowing beauty professionals to communicate more effectively and provide meaningful support to clients, students, and colleagues.

Empathy plays a vital role in the service component of the beauty industry, particularly for nail salon workers, as it directly influences clients' emotional perception of beauty and shapes a positive service experience. Research by A. Bruns and D. Pelli [1] shows that individuals with higher levels of empathy respond more strongly to the emotional dimension of beauty, enhancing the overall perception of the aesthetic value of services received. Nail technicians who demonstrate empathy are therefore able to create a richer emotional experience for their clients, increasing the perceived attractiveness of the results.

Furthermore, a study by R. Rosmalina, D. Wulan, and S. Dian [9] confirmed that empathy is one of the key factors influencing client satisfaction in beauty salons. It was found that the empathetic attitude of staff has a far greater impact on customer satisfaction than other service quality elements such as physical environment or reliability.

Practical applications of empathy in nail technician-client interactions are also outlined in professional guidelines [8], which emphasize the importance of active listening, allocating 70% of the conversation to the client and 30% to the technician, and using non-verbal empathetic cues such as attentiveness and responsiveness to client needs. These practices

help create a trusting environment and psychological comfort, which positively influence the overall impression clients have of the service [8].

Beauty education programs focused on empathy aim to cultivate a set of competencies that support effective client interaction and psychological comfort during service delivery. According to A. Clark's integrated model of empathy [3], the training of nail technicians emphasizes the development of three types of empathetic skills:

- subjective empathy, which is the ability to feel another person's emotions;

- interpersonal empathy, which refers to understanding the client's feelings and experiences;

- objective empathy, which involves applying professional knowledge to address the client's concerns.

Self-reflection also plays a key role, as it enables the technician to evaluate their own emotions and behavior during interactions with clients and adjust them as needed to maintain a comfortable communication atmosphere [3].

Modern training programs for beauty professionals place particular emphasis on the development of soft skills. Among these, M. Costa and C. Cipolla [4] identify several that are critical for professional interaction: effective communication, emotional regulation, self-awareness, tolerance for diversity, and conflict resolution. Empathetic listening and the ability to build trust-based relationships are especially important, as they correlate directly with the success of nail technicians and clients' satisfaction with service quality [4].

Another branch of educational programming focuses on the psychological dimensions of working in the beauty sector, particularly on helping clients develop confidence and self-esteem. These programs are grounded in the principles of empowerment, creating emotionally supportive environments that allow beauty professionals to not only craft aesthetically appealing appearances but also foster psychological comfort. By using empathy, technicians help clients strengthen their confidence in their appearance and sense of personal worth [2].

Contemporary course design for nail specialists is based on an integrative approach that combines scientific, artistic, practical, and communicative dimensions of professional activity. This approach involves providing students with in-depth theoretical knowledge in areas such as dermatology, nail plate anatomy, and the chemistry of materials used in nail procedures [6]. Special attention is given to the development of artistic and aesthetic perception, as nail technicians must possess not only technical skills but also refined aesthetic taste and the ability to create innovative designs in line with current trends [10].

Equally important in training nail specialists is the acquisition of professional communication skills, including empathy, psychological literacy, and the ability to establish effective dialogue with clients. Students are taught how to hold appropriate conversations with clients, what topics to address or avoid, how to recognize a client's emotional state, and how to respond to their needs [10]. In addition, educational courses incorporate elements of sustainable development, the use of eco-friendly materials, and safety practices for both the technician and the client. A separate focus is placed on training nail specialists as entrepreneurs, including business management, marketing, service promotion, and financial literacy. An adapted training program for nail specialists is presented in Table 1.

In the context of empathy development, the educational process serves the functions of socialization, cultural transmission of values, and shaping the ethical stance of a nail technician in interpersonal relationships with clients. It is the pedagogical component of training that creates the conditions for developing soft skills such as active listening, non-verbal communication, emotional self-regulation, and recognizing the client's mood – all of which are key to delivering quality service in the beauty industry.

Table 1 – Nail specialist training program design

Nº	Name of module	Hours
1	Scientific and theoretical foundations of nail technology (nail anatomy, material chemistry, sanitation, hygiene, and dermatology)	100
2	Technical training of the specialist (classic and hardware manicure, pedicure, modern nail design techniques)	200
3	Artistic and aesthetic development (color theory, composition, current trends, creation of personal style and portfolio)	80
4	Communication and psychology in the work of a nail technician (empathy, psychological foundations of communication, ethics of client dialogue, conflict management)	80
5	Business competencies and marketing in nail services (basics of entrepreneurship, service promotion, financial management)	80
6	Practical internship and diploma project (in-salon practice, creation of a business plan or creative portfolio)	100

The formation of empathy in professional training is not possible without the creation of a specifically organized learning environment where the educator acts not only as a source of knowledge but also as a facilitator of interpersonal experience. This requires the implementation of teaching strategies such as case methods, role-playing, reflective practices, and emotionally charged situational modeling. These approaches enable students to learn how to feel, understand, and respond constructively to the needs of others. Psychological and pedagogical modules included in the curriculum foster the development of well-rounded professionals capable of combining a high level of technical skill with a human-centered approach to their work.

Pedagogy in the training of nail specialists performs an integrative function by ensuring an inseparable connection between hard skills and soft skills. Technical abilities—including tool proficiency, knowledge of modern manicure technologies, and adherence to hygiene standards—are insufficient without emotional competence for full professional realization. The work of a nail technician is not limited to mechanically executing procedures; it is a process of interpersonal interaction where the level of empathy directly affects the client's psychological comfort, loyalty, and trust, and thus the specialist's professional reputation.

Educational influence in this field must also focus on developing responsibility, ethical maturity, and critical thinking in future professionals. Special emphasis should be placed on nurturing self-analysis and reflection skills, which allow specialists to evaluate their actions not only in terms of professional efficiency but also from ethical and emotional perspectives. Therefore, pedagogy becomes not only a vehicle for transferring knowledge but also a key mechanism for shaping the professional identity of the nail technician as an empathetic, compassionate, and socially responsible participant in the labor process.

In this way, pedagogy in the training of nail service professionals' acts as a methodological framework that ensures the unity and interconnection between the emotional-psychological and technical components of vocational education. Its role is not only to teach students how to "do," but also to instill an understanding of "why" and "for whom" they work, nurturing professionals with a high level of emotional culture.

Conclusions

The educational training of nail service specialists is characterized by the integration of fundamental scientific knowledge, technical skills, and business competencies into a single structured system. A typical curriculum combines dermatology, material chemistry,

sanitation, and hygiene with practices in classical and hardware manicure, artistic-aesthetic training, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, a lack of standardized pedagogical training for instructors and insufficient consideration of industry innovations has been identified, which highlights the need for targeted professional development programs for educators.

Empathy holds a central place in the professional discourse of the beauty industry, as it directly determines the quality of interpersonal interaction and client satisfaction. Based on the concept of emotional intelligence, empathy is expressed through subjective, interpersonal, and objective levels, enabling the specialist to accurately recognize emotions, experience them appropriately, and apply professional knowledge to address the client's needs. Practical research shows that a high level of empathy significantly enhances the aesthetic perception of results and strengthens client loyalty.

The proposed training program for developing emotionally intelligent nail specialists emphasizes the modules "Communication and psychology," "Artistic and aesthetic development," and "Practical internship," where empathy is integrated through case methods, role-playing, reflective practices, and simulations of emotionally rich situations. These pedagogical strategies foster soft skills such as active listening, non-verbal communication, and emotional self-regulation, which complement technical mastery and contribute to the formation of a socially responsible, client-centered professional in the field of nail services.

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