



DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical foundations and educational opportunities for developing emotional intelligence in preschool children. It draws on an analysis of selected scholarly sources, a comparison of concepts, and a methodological synthesis. The relationships and distinctions among emotional intelligence, emotional competence, and social-emotional learning are discussed. Play-based activities are proposed to support emotion recognition and labeling, understanding emotional causes, empathy, and emotion regulation. The article also addresses teacher–parent collaboration, co-regulation, and criteria for pedagogical observation. The practical recommendations are methodological proposals developed for this article; their effectiveness has not been experimentally tested within this work.

Keywords: Preschool education, emotional intelligence, emotional competence, empathy, self-regulation, co-regulation, play, pedagogical observation.

MAKTABGACHA YOSHDAGI BOLALARDA EMOTSIONAL INTELLEKTNI RIVOJLANTIRISH

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada maktabgacha yoshdagi bolalarda emotsional intellektni rivojlantirishning nazariy asoslari va pedagogik imkoniyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Maqola tanlangan ilmiy manbalarni tahlil qilish, tushunchalarni taqqoslash va metodik umumlashtirishga asoslangan. Emotsional intellekt, emotsional kompetentlik va ijtimoiy-emotsional ta'lim o'rtasidagi bog'liqlik hamda farqlar



yoritiladi. Hissiyotlarni tanish va nomlash, ularning sababini tushunish, empatiya va hissiy holatni boshqarishni qo'llab-quvvatlashga qaratilgan o'yinlar taklif etiladi. Tarbiyachi va ota-onalarning hamkorligi, birgalikda boshqarish hamda pedagogik kuzatish mezonlari muhokama qilinadi. Maqoladagi amaliy tavsiyalar mualliflik metodik takliflari bo'lib, ularning samaradorligi ushbu ish doirasida tajriba orqali tekshirilmagan.

Kalit so'zlar: maktabgacha ta'lim, emotsional intellekt, emotsional kompetentlik, empatiya, o'zini boshqarish, birgalikda boshqarish, o'yin, pedagogik kuzatish.

Аннотация

В статье анализируются теоретические основы и педагогические возможности развития эмоционального интеллекта у детей дошкольного возраста. Работа основана на анализе избранных научных источников, сопоставлении понятий и методическом обобщении. Рассматриваются взаимосвязь и различия между эмоциональным интеллектом, эмоциональной компетентностью и социально-эмоциональным обучением. Предлагаются игровые задания, направленные на распознавание и называние эмоций, понимание их причин, развитие эмпатии и поддержку эмоциональной регуляции. Обсуждаются сотрудничество педагогов и родителей, совместная регуляция и критерии педагогического наблюдения. Практические рекомендации представляют собой авторские методические предложения; их эффективность не проверялась экспериментально в рамках данной работы.

Ключевые слова: дошкольное образование, эмоциональный интеллект, эмоциональная компетентность, эмпатия, саморегуляция, совместная регуляция, игра, педагогическое наблюдение.

Introduction

Communication in preschool education requires children to express their wishes, take turns, resolve conflicts, and consider the feelings of others. A child might become angry when a toy is taken away, anxious when joining a new group, or



upset when losing a game. In such situations, the educator's role is not to dismiss the emotion, but to help the child understand it and choose a safe course of action. Examining emotional intelligence within preschool education helps clarify the link between emotions, thought processes, and social behavior. A child's constant silence or unquestioning obedience to adults cannot be considered sufficient indicators of emotional development. Skills such as recognizing emotions, asking for help, and considering another child's perspective require specific observation. The aim of this article is to analyze the theoretical foundations for developing emotional intelligence skills in preschool children and to formulate methodological recommendations suitable for daily pedagogical practice. The key challenge lies in determining how to integrate specific activities with everyday interactions and how to monitor the child's development.

Research Methodology

The article was prepared in the form of a theoretical and methodological analysis. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the scientific definition of emotional intelligence, emotional competence in preschool-age children, the educator's role in emotional socialization, and the outcomes of social-emotional programs. Methods involving the comparison of concepts, content analysis of research findings, and the methodological generalization of practical situations were employed.

This work is not a systematic review covering all existing research. No new experiments, surveys, or diagnostic assessments involving children were conducted. Consequently, scientific results reported in the literature are distinguished from the outcomes of the exercises proposed in the article. The practical model is presented as a methodological proposal requiring validation through further research within the local context.

Analysis of Theoretical Foundations and Concepts

J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, and D. R. Caruso associate emotional intelligence with the ability to reason about emotions and to use emotional information to facilitate thought. Their model identifies four key components: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions



[1]. This approach helps avoid equating emotional intelligence with general politeness or the sum of all a person's positive qualities.

For preschool-age children, it is not appropriate to assess these theoretical constructs by directly using tests designed for adults. Pedagogical efforts can instead focus on recognizing emotions in situations familiar to the child, expressing them through words or other forms of communication, explaining their causes, and selecting appropriate actions with the help of adults. This adaptation represents a simplified pedagogical interpretation of the theoretical model.

The concept of emotional competence encompasses emotional knowledge, the expression of emotions, and emotional regulation as they manifest in everyday interactions. S. A. Denham and her colleagues studied the emotional expression, emotion management, and emotional knowledge of 143 preschool-aged children. The study demonstrated a link between emotional competence at ages 3–4 and both concurrent and subsequent social competence [2]. While this result indicates a significant connection, it does not allow for the precise prediction of an individual child's future behavior based on a single indicator.

Social-emotional learning, on the other hand, refers to the educational activities and approaches that foster these skills. Thus, a distinction is made between emotional intelligence as a theoretical concept regarding abilities, emotional competence as a concept describing practical manifestation, and social-emotional learning as a pedagogical process. Although these concepts overlap, simply labeling a change observed in a program as an "increase in emotional intelligence" requires specifying exactly what the measurement assessed. Research findings and their interpretation

C. E. Domitrovich, R. C. Cortes, and M. T. Greenberg evaluated the PATHS program—adapted for preschool-aged children—in a randomized controlled trial. Twenty classrooms participated in the study; in the ten intervention classrooms, educators conducted weekly lessons and supplementary activities over a nine-month period. Children participating in the program demonstrated superior knowledge regarding emotions, and both parents and educators rated their social competence more highly [4]. While these results highlight the potential of



systematic intervention, they do not justify the conclusion that a one-off game would yield the same effect.

A systematic review and meta-analysis by C. Blewitt and colleagues synthesized data from 79 studies involving 18,292 participants. The authors found that participation in general social-emotional programs within preschool settings was associated with positive outcomes in social and emotional competence, behavioral regulation, and certain early learning indicators [5]. However, because this synthesis encompasses a wide range of programs and assessment tools, it does not guarantee specific results for a local group.

A methodological conclusion drawn from the literature analysis is that the development of emotional skills should occur not only during dedicated conversations but also through everyday interactions. The proposed approach integrates play, meaningful dialogue, and the educator's own example. Its effectiveness is measured not by the number of exercises performed, but by the child's ability to apply the relevant skill in new situations.

Pedagogical conditions for development

An emotionally safe environment enables a child to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. Instead of saying, "Don't be afraid; there's nothing to be scared of," an educator might respond, "You felt worried. I am here with you; let's look at this together." This approach acknowledges the emotion while demonstrating how to handle the situation. Accepting an emotion does not imply condoning harmful behavior: it is acceptable to feel angry, but it is not acceptable to hit another child.

The educator's own behavior serves as a daily model for the child. In a theoretical review by Denham, Bassett, and Zinsser, parents and educators are identified as key socializing figures who shape a child's emotional competence [3]. Based on this perspective, it is recommended that the educator manage their voice tone during disagreements, acknowledge their own mistakes, and verbally demonstrate the process of seeking a solution.

In this article, "co-regulation" refers to an adult staying with the child to help them understand their emotional state and choose a safe course of action. When strong emotions arise, rather than offering lengthy explanations, it is better to



calm the situation, provide brief verbal support, and discuss the problem once the child is ready. The required level of independent regulation is adapted to the child's age, speech capabilities, and current state.

Enriching the child's emotional vocabulary is also a key methodological requirement. Words such as "happy," "sad," "angry," "surprised," and "worried" are explained through stories, games, and real-life situations. However, it is not advisable to teach children to determine a person's emotions solely based on facial expressions. Instead, the child can learn to consider the context and make cautious inferences, such as, "They might be sad; let's ask them."

Development through games and exercises

The following exercises are methodological suggestions developed based on an analysis of scientific literature. They are not presented as scripted sessions from the PATHS program or as a specific, pre-packaged proprietary program. Instead, the educator adapts the activity to the group's language, experiences, and the children's capacity to participate.

In the "Emotion and Situation" game, children link a card depicting an emotion to a short story. For example, they discuss how a character might feel when seeing a friend arrive or when a tower they built collapses. The activity acknowledges that a single situation can give rise to various emotions; the goal is not to find one correct answer, but to justify one's thoughts based on the situation.

In the "Help the Hero" task, a puppet or fairy-tale character finds themselves in a difficult situation. The educator asks questions such as, "How might they be feeling?", "What could we ask them?", and "What kind of help can we offer?" The child selects a form of assistance suited to the character's needs. For instance, instead of forcing a hug on someone who is upset, the child might suggest asking, "Shall I sit next to you?"

In the "Stop and Choose" exercise, the child explores simple solutions to a conflict while remaining calm. Options such as asking for the toy instead of snatching it, taking turns, or seeking help from an adult are demonstrated through role-play. When strong emotions arise, the educator offers a brief reminder and supports the child. Taking a break or practicing slow breathing is used as a helpful strategy rather than a form of punishment.



In the “Building Together” game, two or three children create a shared structure. This activity requires sharing materials, agreeing on a plan, and listening to the other child's suggestions. The educator focuses on the collaborative actions taken rather than the aesthetic quality of the final result, noting, for example: “You listened to your friend's idea and combined both suggestions.” This feedback helps the child understand which specific actions were constructive. For younger children, the focus is on expressing emotions, using brief verbalizations, and seeking assistance from an adult. Older preschool children can be encouraged to explain the reasons behind their feelings, discuss another person's perspective, and compare various solutions. This distinction is not a rigid developmental standard; individual needs for support are taken into account on a case-by-case basis.

Collaboration between educators and parents

When the approaches used at home and at the preschool are consistent, the child can practice coping strategies across different situations. Collaboration should begin with a discussion of specific incidents rather than general criticisms directed at the parent. Instead of labeling a child with a statement like “Your child cannot manage their emotions,” observations such as “They struggled with waiting their turn but returned to the game after receiving help” are shared.

Families may be encouraged to engage in brief conversations, read stories together, and label emotions as they arise in daily life. For instance, a parent might ask, “What made you happy today?” and listen to the child's response. If the child does not wish to speak, they can be given the opportunity to express themselves through drawing or play. Conversing in the family's preferred language fosters meaningful communication.

It is beneficial to select a shared goal for collaboration—for example, “asking for help when feeling angry.” The educator and the parent note when the child asks for help independently or the type of support required to do so. The dialogue focuses on understanding changes in the child's own experience rather than comparing them with other children.



Criteria for pedagogical observation

Observation serves to identify skills demonstrated in the child's actual activities and the level of support required. The criteria in the table do not constitute a standardized diagnostic test. It is not recommended to assign a general score for the child's emotional intelligence based on a single observation or a response recorded on a card.

Focus	Observed behavior	Pedagogical support
Recognizing emotions	Expresses their state using words, gestures, or pictures	Providing a brief label and a choice
Understanding the cause	Connects an emotional experience to a specific event	Describing the situation and asking a simple question
Empathy	Asks about another child's state or offers help	Anticipating the need and demonstrating how to ask for clarification
Managing and reconciling	Asks for help, or agrees on taking turns or a solution	Calming down together and practicing an alternative action

An observation record documents the situation, the child's specific actions, the assistance provided, and the outcome. For example, a note stating, "Attempted to take the toy; asked for a turn after a reminder from the educator," indicates an action performed with support. If, in a similar subsequent situation, the child asks independently, this records a reduced need for assistance. Such an observation indicates the direction of change but does not allow one to attribute the cause solely to a single exercise.

Discussion

A key aspect of the proposed approach is linking knowledge about emotions to everyday actions. There is a difference between recognizing the expression for "sad" on a card and asking a friend how they are feeling when they are actually sad. By observing both situations, the educator supports the transition from knowledge to practical interaction. The outcome of the game is evaluated alongside the potential for application in real life.

When implementing practical recommendations, factors such as group size, the educator's preparedness, the regularity of exercises, and communication with



families must be taken into account. In large groups, short conversations and small-group games can be organized. However, time constraints do not justify dismissing a child's feelings; instead, plans should be made to discuss the issue later while maintaining a safe environment for communication. The article's limitations stem from the selected literature and the nature of the theoretical generalizations made. Directly transferring the results of a foreign program to a local context requires adaptation to the specific language, culture, and educational environment. Future research should incorporate pre- and post-assessments, a comparison group, and independent evaluation. Parental consent and the privacy of children's personal data must be taken into account when organizing the study.

Conclusion

Developing emotional intelligence skills in preschool-aged children can be achieved by supporting the recognition and naming of emotions, understanding their causes, considering the perspectives of others, and selecting appropriate behaviors. Theoretical and empirical literature demonstrates the link between emotional development and social relationships, as well as the potential of systematic social-emotional learning.

In pedagogical practice, it is recommended to integrate play, the discussion of fairy tales, adult modeling, and the collaborative resolution of everyday conflicts. Success is evidenced not by the child concealing their emotions, but by their ability to express them clearly, seek assistance, and participate in finding cooperative solutions. The exercises and criteria proposed in the article serve to guide the planning of practical work; empirically verifying their effectiveness within the local context remains a task for future research.

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