

# Importance Of Fostering Emotional Intelligence In Preschool Students

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## ABSTRACT

Preschool years are of paramount importance for children's comprehensive development, as they establish the foundational elements for their future academic, social, and emotional growth. During this stage, they acquire cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills that are deemed essential for their future life. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a prominent aspect of this framework, as it enables individuals to perceive, understand, regulate, and apply their own emotions as well as those of others. This component fosters the development of empathetic and resilient children, thereby enabling them to effectively resolve conflicts and facilitate their social adaptation within the educational environment. The impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on academic motivation, problem-solving skills, and the quality of interpersonal relationships has been demonstrated in numerous studies. EI has also been shown to optimize emotional management, reduce anxiety, and strengthen general well-being. This essay explores the pertinence of EI in the context of preschool education, presenting pedagogical approaches for its development within the school system in Cúcuta, Colombia. The benefits associated with EI support the implementation of pedagogical practices adapted to the sociocultural characteristics of the region. These practices favor the early development of emotional competencies and, consequently, the integral growth of children. They do so by means of a holistic preschool education approach. **Keywords:** Preschool education, child development, emotional intelligence, psychological resilience, mental health.

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## INTRODUCTION

Preschool education establishes the foundational framework for children's holistic development, as it is a period of significant academic, social, and emotional development. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) emerges as a pivotal factor in students' academic success and overall well-being. Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to effectively identify, recognize, manage, and use one's own and others' emotions. EI is crucial for facing life's challenges with resilience and empathy (Muñoz, 2023).

In recent decades, emotional education has emerged as a foundational element of children's holistic development. The incorporation of emotional education into research and teaching has prompted the integration of emotional development into curricula from early childhood. In Cúcuta, Colombia, a concerted effort has been made to prioritize the consolidation of EI in preschool children, particularly

in the context of prevailing social challenges, including globalization and intricate social relationships. However, despite this growing interest in EI, there is still a need to create specific pedagogical models that are effective and adapted to local needs (Rosero & Sarmiento, 2022; Torres, 2016).

This essay examines contemporary pedagogical trends and proposes an adapted model to enhance emotional intelligence in preschoolers in Cúcuta. The hypothesis under consideration posits that emotional education should be incorporated into the learning experience. The rationale for this assertion is twofold: first, the acquisition of academic knowledge is not sufficient in and of itself to ensure the development of emotionally competent and socially responsible citizens; second, emotional education is a necessary component for achieving this dual objective.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Emotional intelligence is a term of particular significance in the analysis of relationships and human behavior. Emotional intelligence, as conceptualized by Daniel Goleman in 1995, is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as to influence the emotions of others (Goleman, 2022). According to Goleman et al. (2021), emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to accurately perceive one's own emotions and those of others, to understand emotional cues in relationships, and to apply emotional intelligence to achieve well-being and social competence.

The model under consideration comprises five primary components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness, defined as the ability to recognize one's own emotions and the impact of these emotions on one's thoughts and behavior (Hernández & Cogollo, 2023), is a critical component of mental health. Self-regulation is defined as the capacity to manage or modify self-destructive impulses and mood, thereby facilitating coping with stress and adaptation to new circumstances (García & Navarrete, 2022; Goleman, 2022). Motivation can be defined as the intrinsic drive to commit to achieving goals in the face of challenges (Muñoz, 2023).

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the emotions of others, is a fundamental component of strong and healthy relationships (Cantos, 2024). Social skills play an important role in managing interpersonal relationships, leadership, influence, and teamwork (Barturén & Saavedra, 2022).

The development of EI has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on both personal well-being and work performance. Recent studies have indicated that emotional intelligence (EI) is a more effective predictor of professional success than intelligence quotient (IQ). This finding is supported by research conducted by Goleman (2022), H. Martínez et al. (2022), and Padilla & Sandoval (2022). In the domain of education, it is imperative to incorporate the cultivation of Emotional Intelligence (EI) into the educational framework. Social-emotional learning (ASE) programs have been demonstrated to have a dual impact on student behavior and academic performance (Barturén & Saavedra, 2022).

### Importance of emotional intelligence in child development

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a critical component of children's holistic development during preschool years. This encompasses not only the recognition and management of one's own emotions, but also the ability to understand and respond appropriately to the emotions of others (Cantos, 2024). The promotion of emotional intelligence (EI) in preschool-aged children has been demonstrated to yield a variety of advantages, including enhanced learning abilities, improved social conduct, strengthened mental health, and augmented overall well-being (Lagla et al., 2023).

### Impact on learning

The cultivation of EI in early childhood creates conducive conditions for learning. The ability to manage stress and anxiety in the school environment is a hallmark of emotionally competent children, who are able to focus and actively participate in educational activities. A multitude of studies have demonstrated that the implementation of social-emotional learning programs within the context of preschool education results in a substantial enhancement in academic performance (Barturén & Saavedra, 2022). Conversely, children who possess well-developed emotional skills tend to exhibit superior problem-solving abilities and creativity, which, in turn, can enhance their academic performance (Goleman, 2022).

It has been demonstrated that the role of the educator is not merely incidental to the learning process; rather, the educator plays a central role in the learning process, contributing to the child's personal and social growth. According to Goleman (2022), the ability to identify when they feel distracted or overwhelmed by negative emotions and to make decisions to regain focus are two components of EI that are essential for children. These components are part of the larger concept of self-awareness and self-regulation. The capacity for self-regulation is a critical factor in maintaining concentration and exertion during academic activities.

The school environment has been identified as a significant source of emotional distress for students. Emotional intelligence has been shown to equip children with the tools necessary to effectively navigate these challenges. The incorporation of techniques such as deep breathing or cognitive

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restructuring has been demonstrated to facilitate the reduction of stress and anxiety in children, thereby exerting a positive influence on their performance (Bernaola & Briceño, 2023; García & Navarrete, 2022). A balanced emotional state has been shown to promote the acquisition of new knowledge and the adeptness in problem-solving (García & Navarrete, 2022).

Motivation constitutes an indispensable aspect of the learning process. Children with high EI exhibit greater intrinsic motivation, which implies finding meaning and satisfaction in the act of learning, beyond external rewards (Bisquerra & García, 2018). This enables individuals to establish personal objectives and demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity.

Finally, EI strengthens critical problem-solving skills. Children who demonstrate effective emotional regulation tend to approach challenges with a thoughtful and composed demeanor, as opposed to acting impulsively (Urueña et al., 2023; Zambrano & Lazo, 2023). This analytical ability has been shown to enhance performance in academic and personal contexts (Mejía et al., 2024).

### **Influence on social behavior**

Learning is not a solitary endeavor; rather, it is a social process that necessitates constant interaction with teachers and classmates. The cultivation of emotional intelligence has been demonstrated to facilitate the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships, as children develop empathy and social skills that enable effective collaboration and communication (Mata, 2021). The cultivation of these relationships has been demonstrated to enhance the classroom climate, thereby engendering an environment that is conducive to learning and more conducive to motivation.

A body of research has demonstrated a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic performance (Barturén & Saavedra, 2022; García & Navarrete, 2022; Llanos & Machuca, 2023; Mejía et al., 2024). School-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have been demonstrated to engender substantial enhancements in both student behavior and academic performance (Buitrago et al., 2019). The integration of EI into the school curriculum enables children to cultivate fundamental competencies that equip them to

confront academic challenges and attain their full potential.

Emotional intelligence is therefore crucial for the development of social skills in the preschool stage. Empathy, a pivotal component of EI, enables children to comprehend and reciprocate the emotions of their peers, thereby fostering cooperative and healthy relationships. Individuals who demonstrate proficiency in emotional identification and management exhibit a propensity for reduced interpersonal conflict and exhibit more assertive communication. This phenomenon contributes to the cultivation of a harmonious school environment and the strengthening of enduring interpersonal bonds (Mejía et al., 2024).

The development of emotional intelligence (EI) from an early age has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on children's mental health. The ability to identify and express emotions appropriately is a critical component of mental well-being, as it plays a pivotal role in preventing the accumulation of stress and anxiety. These psychological elements, if left unaddressed, can potentially lead to adverse mental health outcomes (Luzardo & Rodríguez, 2024). Studies have shown that emotionally competent children exhibit superior levels of self-regulation, demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, and maintain a positive attitude (Bernaola & Briceño, 2023; Goleman, 2022).

Overall, early childhood education (ECE) has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the holistic well-being of children. Individuals who have cultivated this skill have been observed to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and an optimistic perspective on life. Furthermore, they exhibit initiative in establishing personal objectives and demonstrate dedication and intrinsic motivation in pursuing them (Muñoz, 2023). EI also fosters the development of healthy habits, including effective stress management techniques and the cultivation of positive social relationships. These elements are indispensable for achieving a balanced and fulfilling development.

According to the evidence, emotional intelligence can be regarded as a pivotal competence in the developmental process of children. Its implementation has been demonstrated to exert a favorable influence on a wide array of developmental domains. The benefits of stimulating EI in

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preschoolers are manifold, including, but not limited to, learning and social behavior, mental health, and overall well-being. Therefore, it is imperative that parents, educators, and caregivers implement strategies and programs aimed at promoting early-childhood education (ECE) from the earliest stages of life to ensure full and healthy development.

### **PEDAGOGICAL TRENDS FOR THE PROMOTION OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PRESCHOOL**

The promotion of emotional intelligence (EI) in preschool education has gained significant relevance in recent years, due to the recognition of its positive impact on the integral development of children. Among the main pedagogical trends aimed at strengthening EI at this crucial stage of child development, Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) stands out.

#### **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been recognized as a foundational educational strategy to cultivate emotional intelligence in preschool children and foster an inclusive and understanding school environment (Herman, 2018). SEL programs have been shown to develop individual skills and to create a positive learning climate in which children practice and apply these skills in everyday contexts (UNESCO, 2022). This strengthens their ability to manage complex emotions and provides them with useful tools to resolve conflicts constructively and collaborate effectively with their peers.

Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated the favorable impact of these programs on children's psychological and emotional well-being (Vernucci & Zamora, 2020). Through the cultivation of emotional intelligence, children can enhance their self-esteem, alleviate anxiety, and experience a reduction in stress. This dynamic has been shown to positively impact both emotional development and academic and social performance throughout the school career (Forga, 2022). SEL has been demonstrated to foster an environment of mutual respect and support among students (Smith, 2023). Group cohesion is strengthened, and students develop increased resilience in the face of the emotional and social challenges that are inherent to the educational process (Jones, 2021).

#### **Play and recreational activities**

Play is a fundamental pedagogical tool in preschool education and is essential for the integral development of children. Playful activities offer myriad benefits that extend to the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social domains (Fernández, 2024). Through play, children experiment and explore freely, which facilitates the development of skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making. Similarly, play fosters a secure environment for the articulation of emotions and sentiments, a pivotal component of early emotional development (Posligua et al., 2022).

In the preschool context, structured play activities, such as role-plays, have been shown to be particularly beneficial. These activities facilitate the simulation of diverse roles and social scenarios, thereby fostering an understanding of one's own emotions and those of others. Participation in role-play activities has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of emotional intelligence in children. These activities promote the expression of appropriate emotions, foster the ability to empathize with others, and cultivate pro-social behaviors such as cooperation (Cantos, 2024). Furthermore, play fosters constructive conflict resolution, as children learn to negotiate, share, and collaborate by interacting with their peers in a structured environment, guided by trained adults in preschool education (Guerrero & Vega, 2023).

#### **Mindfulness Programs**

The integration of mindfulness programs within the preschool curriculum has emerged as a salient strategy to cultivate emotional intelligence in young children (Piñate et al., 2021). This pedagogical approach aims to inculcate children with the capacity to direct their attention toward the present moment, to discern their thoughts and emotions devoid of judgment, and to respond in a conscious and compassionate manner (Zaitegi, 2018). The implementation of breathing exercises, guided meditation, and mindfulness activities has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of greater emotional self-awareness and strengthen self-regulation skills in children. These findings not only promote effective stress and anxiety management but also contribute substantially to emotional and mental well-being from early childhood onward (Bernate & Vargas, 2020).

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The systematic implementation of mindfulness practices in the preschool setting has been demonstrated to promote not only emotional development but also enhance cognitive abilities, including concentration and active engagement in educational activities (Sinici, 2019). By cultivating self-awareness and empathy, children develop the fundamental skills necessary for their personal and social development. In a similar vein, the implementation of mindfulness practices during this developmental period has been shown to establish a robust foundation for a more balanced and conscious adult life. This preparatory phase equips children with the tools necessary to approach future challenges with increased serenity, mental clarity, and emotional resilience (Arrojo, 2016).

### **Comprehensive emotional education**

Another significant trend is comprehensive emotional education, which aims to incorporate emotional development into all areas of the school curriculum (Peña, 2021). This approach acknowledges emotions as pivotal components in the learning process and in the overall well-being of children. To this end, educators employ an array of creative strategies, including storytelling, music, art, and movement, to guide children's exploration and emotional expression in a constructive manner (Herman, 2018). In addition to fostering emotional self-awareness, this model emphasizes the establishment of a secure and welcoming classroom environment, wherein children feel at ease sharing their emotions and personal experiences (Goleman, 2022).

The integration of emotional education into all aspects of the school curriculum has been demonstrated to enhance academic learning while concurrently fortifying children's social and emotional competencies. By incorporating activities designed to promote emotional reflection and empathy from the earliest stages of education, educators can effectively prepare their students to navigate the emotional and social challenges encountered in daily life. This holistic approach has been demonstrated to contribute to two primary outcomes. Firstly, it has been shown to improve the emotional climate in the classroom. Secondly, it has been demonstrated to support the integral development of children, thereby fostering more

meaningful learning and greater personal satisfaction (Goleman, 2022).

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF EDUCATORS**

The education and training of educators in emotional intelligence is imperative for the success of any initiative aimed at promoting this competence in preschool education. It is imperative that educators cultivate the capacity to identify and regulate their own emotions, while acquiring competencies to instruct and exemplify suitable emotional conduct for their students. In this regard, continuous professional development programs—comprising workshops, seminars, and mentoring processes—are pivotal instruments in equipping educators with efficacious strategies to incorporate emotional intelligence into their pedagogical practices (Robledo et al., 2018; Torres, 2016).

This training process has been shown to enhance teachers' emotional intelligence and to enable them to cultivate learning environments conducive to the development of children's socio-emotional competencies in a natural and meaningful manner (Lagla et al., 2023). According to Espinosa (2020), educators who are emotionally prepared respond with greater empathy and understanding to the emotional needs of their students. This contributes to the generation of a welcoming, safe school environment that is conducive to integral development during the preschool stage.

### **Family Involvement**

Family involvement is critical to the development of emotional intelligence (EI) in children. Programs that engage parents and caregivers in emotional learning are significantly more effective. To this end, it is essential to establish constant and open communication between school and home, providing families with clear information on the importance of EI and guidance on how to support it from home (Mata, 2021).

Specific workshops allow parents to better understand their children's emotional needs and acquire practical tools to foster social-emotional skills in the family environment. Likewise, shared activities – such as mindfulness exercises, emotional expression games and reflections on everyday experiences – reinforce what has been learned in school, strengthen family bonds and promote continuous and coherent emotional support (Peña, 2022).

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## Use of technology and digital resources

In the present context, technology is regarded as a pioneering instrument for fostering EI in preschool. Educational applications, digital platforms, and interactive games offer engaging and personalized experiences that facilitate emotional learning (Zambrano & Lazo, 2023). These tools facilitate children's exploration of emotions through simulations of social scenarios, emotional self-assessments, and age-appropriate mindfulness exercises (Piñate et al., 2021).

However, it is imperative that these resources be selected based on pedagogical and ethical criteria that are commensurate with the developmental level of the child. The supervision of teachers and families is imperative to ensure a meaningful and secure use of technology, thereby fostering an environment conducive to both emotional learning and affective accompaniment (Martínez, 2022).

The promotion of emotional intelligence in the preschool stage is imperative for the comprehensive development of children. Current pedagogical trends, such as social-emotional learning, play, mindfulness, teacher training, family engagement, technology use, and inclusion, offer valuable strategies for their promotion. A proper implementation of these practices has been demonstrated to contribute significantly to the emotional, social, and academic well-being of children. Indeed, such implementation prepares them to face life's challenges with resilience.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is a critical component of preschool students' comprehensive development, as it directly influences their ability to manage emotions, establish positive interpersonal relationships, and confront academic and social challenges. Its incorporation into the school curriculum is imperative to ensure balanced learning and harmonious coexistence in the classroom.

Contemporary pedagogical trends offer an array of strategies to cultivate emotional intelligence at this juncture, including socio-emotional learning (SEL), emotional education integrated into engaging activities and active methodologies, all of which have yielded favorable outcomes. However, its implementation in Cúcuta necessitates adaptations

that address the region's distinct socio-cultural and economic characteristics.

A variety of analyses of the local educational reality indicate that preschool teachers in Cúcuta face limitations in terms of training and resources to implement structured emotional education programs. This situation underscores the pressing need to provide training and pedagogical tools that enable educators to seamlessly integrate the development of emotional intelligence into their practices.

A pedagogical approach aimed at strengthening emotional intelligence from an early age has been shown to favor the academic performance and emotional well-being of students. Furthermore, this approach has been demonstrated to promote an inclusive school climate, based on empathy, cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution.

The adaptation of pedagogical strategies in accordance with the needs and characteristics of the Cucuteño context has the potential to significantly improve the quality of preschool education. Addressing these demands will facilitate the development of a generation of emotionally competent students who possess the necessary skills to effectively navigate the social and academic challenges of their environment.

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