

# THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Recent research underscores the importance of emotional behavior learning, noting an increasing prevalence of loneliness among both children and adults. In Romania's education system, academic success is prioritized, often overshadowing the emotional aspects linked to success or failure. Therefore, it is crucial to train educators to recognize, regulate, and express their emotions, enabling them to effectively guide students in managing their own emotional experiences.*

**Key words:** *emotional development, intervention strategies, emotional and social skills.*

## 1. Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping not only cognitive abilities but also the emotional development of students. In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, emotional intelligence is recognized as a critical component of personal and academic success. Research highlights the increasing importance of emotional competence in fostering resilience, self-regulation, and social adaptation (Durlak et al., 2022). However, despite growing acknowledgment of its significance, emotional development often remains secondary to academic achievement in formal education systems, particularly in Romania. The development of emotional intelligence in children includes the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, as well as to interpret the emotions of others (Brackett et al., 2023). Unlike cognitive skills, emotional competencies are highly malleable and influenced by environmental factors, emphasizing the need for intentional and structured emotional education in schools. Teachers play a fundamental role in this process, as their emotional awareness and ability to regulate their own emotions directly impact students' emotional learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2018).

The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the significance of emotional education. The sudden shift disrupted traditional learning environments, increasing feelings of isolation, stress, and anxiety among students (Hwang et al., 2021). In this context, educators had to adapt to new methods of

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engagement, using digital platforms to foster emotional connection and support student well-being. However, challenges such as limited teacher training in socio-emotional learning and varying levels of digital literacy hindered the effectiveness of these efforts (Weissberg et al., 2022).

Parental involvement is another essential component of emotional development. Research suggests that a supportive home environment, characterized by open communication and emotional validation, significantly enhances children's emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2021). Parents' ability to guide their children through emotionally challenging situations—especially in the context of remote learning—was crucial in maintaining emotional stability and academic motivation (Zins et al., 2022).

Incorporating socio-emotional learning (SEL) into education requires well-structured, age-appropriate activities that engage students in meaningful emotional experiences. Techniques such as storytelling, music, art, and mindfulness exercises have been shown to promote positive emotional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2020). Additionally, active learning methodologies, including group discussions, role-playing, and guided reflection, help students develop self-awareness and interpersonal skills (Rivers et al., 2021).

Extracurricular activities also play a vital role in promoting emotional and social competencies. Participation in sports, creative arts, and community service provides students with opportunities to develop teamwork, empathy, and resilience (OECD, 2023). In conclusion, emotional education is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of the learning process. While research underscores the profound impact of emotional intelligence on personal and professional success, its implementation in educational settings remains inconsistent. Teachers' perceptions and preparedness to integrate SEL into their teaching practices are key factors in determining its effectiveness.

## **2. Research Objectives and Method**

The main objective of the current study was to identify the key factors that influence the emotional development of children in kindergartens and schools. Specifically:

1. To evaluate the extent to which teachers recognize and support students' emotional development in their teaching practices.
2. To explore teachers' perspectives on their preparedness and available resources for addressing students' emotional needs in the classroom.
3. To analyze the challenges educators face in integrating emotional education into the school curriculum.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the current state of emotional education in schools and inform future strategies for enhancing teachers' roles in fostering emotional intelligence among students.

### **2.1. Participants**

The participants of the research were 30 teachers from preschool and primary education, 23 of whom work in primary education, while 7 work in extended program kindergartens. They are employed in various educational institutions across different

cities in the country, including Codlea, Ghimbav, Braşov, Bacău, Galaţi, Brăila, Vaslui, and Buzău. The participants were intentionally selected to ensure they did not come from the same educational institution, aiming to obtain diverse responses and to demonstrate that, regardless of the curriculum underlying education, each teacher adapts their involvement in the socio-emotional development process based on experience, personal development level, and willingness to create change. The period for completing the questionnaire was from September to October 2024.

The respondents' ages ranged from 22 to 56 years, with the majority aged between 20-30 years (53%), followed by smaller proportions aged 30-40 years (20%), 40-50 years (17%), and 50-60 years (10%). In terms of teaching experience, 43% of participants reported having between 5-10 years of experience, indicating a predominantly mid-career demographic. The sample consisted of 23 primary education teachers (77%) and 7 preschool educators (23%).

## **2.2. Instruments**

The research was conducted using a survey. The questionnaire was self-administered by the study participants via Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on emotional intelligence in education and was pretested with a small group of teachers to ensure clarity and relevance. *An example of an item included is: "How often do you maintain eye contact with students during lessons?"* The items were constructed drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Goleman's emotional competence model (1995) and adapted to reflect context-specific classroom practices. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

*Demographic Information:* This section included questions on participants' age, gender, years of teaching experience, and the level of education in which they teach (preschool or primary education).

*Teaching Practices:* This section contained Likert-scale questions (ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always) and multiple-choice questions assessing the frequency and nature of emotional education practices implemented by teachers, such as addressing students by their first names, maintaining eye contact, and providing verbal reinforcement.

*Perceptions and Challenges:* This section explored teachers' attitudes toward emotional education, their perceptions of its importance in schools, and the challenges they face in implementing emotional intelligence training within their classrooms. It included both Likert-scale and open-ended questions to allow for qualitative insights.

The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on emotional intelligence in education and was pretested with a small group of teachers to ensure clarity and relevance. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine frequency distributions and mean scores for key variables.

## **3. Results**

The study's findings provide key insights into the teaching practices and perspectives of educators regarding emotional education. To enhance clarity, the analysis focuses on

the most relevant results while minimizing detailed item-by-item descriptions. Composite statistics and graphical representations further illustrate the trends observed in the data.

Key Findings on teaching practices and emotional education are presented below, based on descriptive analysis of participants' answers.

- *Personalized Communication*: A notable 80% of respondents consistently addressed students by their first names, reinforcing a personalized approach to communication. In contrast, 20% preferred using students' full names.

- *Eye Contact and Engagement*: Nearly half of the teachers (47%) maintained eye contact with students during lessons, while 33% did so occasionally and 20% rarely engaged in this practice. Similarly, verbal interaction with all students was reported as frequent by 40%, occasional by 37%, and rare by 23%.

- *Respect in Teacher-Student Interactions*: All respondents (100%) affirmed that their behavior towards students is consistently characterized by respect, indicating a strong emphasis on positive teacher-student relationships.

Regarding the integration of emotional education, we identified:

- *Time Dedicated to Emotional Education*: 50% of teachers reported regularly dedicating 5-10 minutes of their lessons to exploring students' emotions, while 43% engaged in such activities occasionally and 7% did not prioritize this aspect due to time constraints.

- *Calm Communication*: While 73% of respondents stated they always address students calmly, 13% reported occasional calmness, and 14% found it challenging to maintain composure in difficult situations.

- *Verbal Praise*: 60% of teachers provided verbal reinforcement for positive behavior, while 30% did not adopt this strategy, and 10% used it sporadically.

Perceptions of emotional education in behavior management showed:

- *Correlation Between Student Behavior and Emotional Needs*: A significant majority (73%) recognized a consistent link between inappropriate behavior and unmet emotional needs, while 13% acknowledged this connection occasionally, and 14% did not perceive any direct relationship.

- *Strategies for Managing Emotional and Social Behavior*: Only 33% of teachers reported feeling adequately equipped to handle emotional and social behavior challenges independently. A larger proportion (40%) relied on school counselors, while 27% did not view addressing these issues as part of their responsibilities.

- *Influence of External Factors*: 60% of respondents believed that negative societal influences play a greater role in shaping student behavior than family education alone. However, 33% attributed behavioral challenges directly to low parental involvement, and 7% considered family influence as a secondary factor.

Regarding the systemic challenges and future directions, the results showed:

- *Collaboration with Parents*: While 64% of teachers maintained strong partnerships with parents, 27% struggled to establish consistent communication, and 9% succeeded only under certain conditions. Discussions with parents occurred daily for 30% of respondents, weekly for 7%, monthly for 33%, and only during formal meetings for 30%.

- *Observing Student Behavior Changes:* 80% of educators actively monitored and addressed shifts in student behavior, while 20% did so only occasionally.
- *Emphasis on Emotional Intelligence in Education Systems:* Only 18% of respondents noticed a significant shift toward prioritizing emotional intelligence in education. A majority (55%) perceived limited progress, and 27% reported no substantial changes.
- *Future Intentions:* Encouragingly, 71% of educators planned to prioritize emotional and social education in their teaching practices, while 13% did not intend to change their approach, and 16% remained uncertain.
- *Training Deficiency:* Alarming, none of the respondents had participated in a national training program focused on students' emotional development, emphasizing a critical gap in teacher training and policy support.

### 3.1. Statistical Analysis

A chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between teachers' years of experience and their likelihood of integrating emotional education into their lessons. The analysis revealed a significant association ( $\chi^2 = 8.91$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that more experienced teachers were more likely to prioritize emotional education compared to their less experienced counterparts.

Additionally, a composite index of emotional education practices was calculated, showing that teachers who frequently engaged in personalized communication, eye contact, and emotional discussions with students scored higher on this index. This suggests that teachers who adopt multiple strategies tend to create a more emotionally supportive learning environment.

To further explore the relationship identified through the chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 8.91$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between teaching experience and the integration of emotional education, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted as a non-parametric alternative to ANOVA, considering the ordinal nature of Likert-scale responses and the relatively small sample size. Teachers were grouped into three categories based on years of experience: group 1: 0–5 years (novice), group 2: 6–15 years (mid-career), group 3: 16+ years (experienced). The composite emotional education index (based on the frequency of strategies like eye contact, personalized communication, and verbal reinforcement) was compared across these groups.

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference between groups ( $H(2) = 7.63$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ), supporting the earlier chi-square findings. Post hoc pairwise comparisons using Dunn's test indicated that Group 3 (experienced teachers) scored significantly higher than Group 1 (novice teachers), with no significant difference between Group 2 and the others.

A boxplot illustrating this distribution (Figure 1) shows that experienced teachers (16+ years) consistently report higher use of emotional strategies while novice teachers show more variability and generally lower scores. Mid-career teachers fall between the two.

These findings reinforce the idea that teaching experience enhances the integration of emotional practices. This may reflect both increased confidence and deeper awareness developed over time.

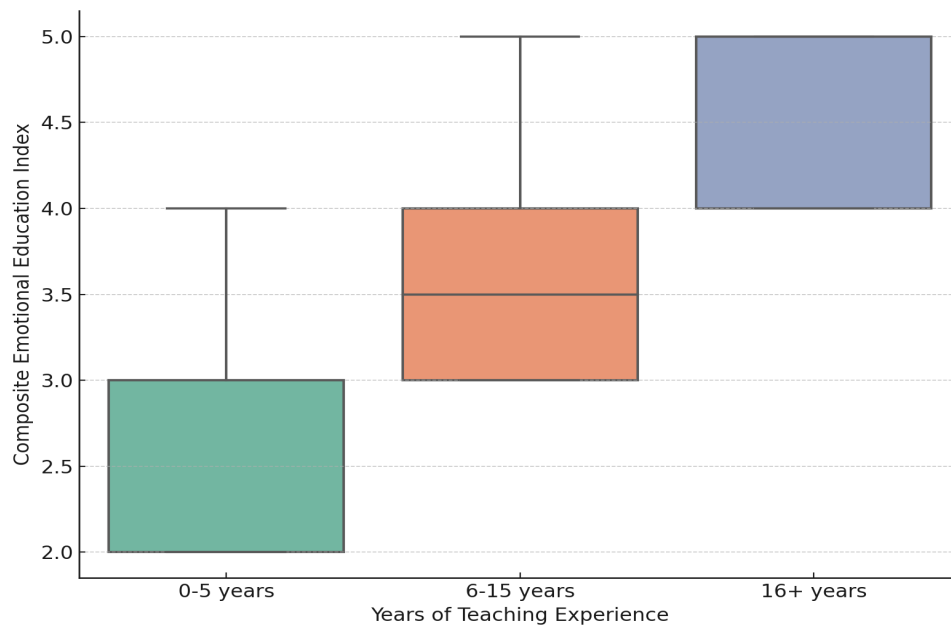


Fig. 1. *Distribution of emotional education practices by teaching experience group*

The boxplot illustrates that teachers with over 16 years of experience consistently report higher use of emotional education strategies, as reflected in the composite index. This supports the hypothesis that greater professional experience correlates with more frequent and diversified implementation of emotional practices in the classroom.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study highlights a growing awareness among educators of the importance of emotional education in teaching. However, systemic challenges such as time constraints, lack of training, and limited curriculum resources hinder its full integration. Addressing these gaps through national-level initiatives and continuous professional development could significantly enhance the role of emotional education in fostering well-rounded student development.

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the current state of emotional education within the Romanian educational system. While there is a growing awareness of the need for emotional education, its implementation remains inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teachers' willingness and capacity to integrate it into their practice.

Concerning the first research objective — identifying key factors that influence children's emotional development — it was evident that both systemic and individual factors play a role. Teachers acknowledge that students' emotional development is affected by a combination of family influences, social environment, and school experiences. However, many educators still perceive emotional development as secondary to academic success, which limits its integration into daily teaching.

Regarding the second objective — evaluating teachers' recognition and support of students' emotional development — only a small percentage actively incorporate emotional education into their lessons. Many still follow traditional methods, prioritizing cognitive learning while neglecting the emotional aspect of student growth. Although some teachers dedicate short periods to emotional discussions, these efforts are neither structured nor widely implemented.

The third objective, exploring teachers' preparedness and available resources, highlighted a significant gap. None of the respondents had received formal training in emotional education through national programs, indicating a lack of institutional support. As a result, teachers interested in fostering students' emotional intelligence must seek professional development independently. Furthermore, the overloaded curriculum restricts their ability to dedicate time to emotional learning, further exacerbating the issue.

Finally, in addressing the fourth objective, which examined the challenges educators face in integrating emotional education into the curriculum, multiple barriers emerged. These include time constraints, a lack of formal training, and the perception that addressing students' emotional needs falls outside the teachers' responsibilities. Additionally, teachers identified external factors—such as negative societal influences and insufficient parental involvement—as contributing to students' behavioral challenges, complicating efforts to implement emotional education effectively.

In conclusion, while the research highlights an increasing recognition of the importance of emotional education, structural limitations hinder its full adoption. Nationwide policies, targeted teacher training programs, and curriculum reforms are necessary to ensure that emotional development becomes an integral part of education, rather than an optional addition. By addressing these gaps, schools can better support students' social and emotional intelligence, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of modern society.

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