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EMOTIONAL LITERACY AS A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The article examines emotional literacy from a pedagogical perspective, emphasizing its role in enhancing emotional intelligence in primary school students. Grounded in developmental and socio-constructivist approaches as well as contemporary models of emotional intelligence, the study conceptualizes emotional literacy as a systematic educational process integrating emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and constructive communication. The paper analyzes emotional literacy as a pedagogical problem generated by the discrepancy between policy-level recognition of socio-emotional competences and their insufficient operationalization in classroom practice. It is argued that emotional literacy represents a transversal pedagogical framework within primary education, contributing to the holistic development of the child and to the consolidation of a positive educational climate.

Keywords: *emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, socio-emotional competences, primary education, self-regulation, empathy, educational climate, personal development.*

ALFABETIZAREA EMOȚIONALĂ CA PROBLEMĂ PEDAGOGICĂ ÎN SPORIREA INTELIGENȚEI EMOȚIONALE LA ELEVII MICI

Articolul examinează alfabetizarea emoțională dintr-o perspectivă pedagogică, subliniind rolul acesteia în îmbunătățirea inteligenței emoționale la elevii din școala primară. Bazat pe abordări de dezvoltare și socio-constructiviste, precum și pe modele contemporane de inteligență emoțională, studiul conceptualizează alfabetizarea emoțională ca un proces educațional sistematic care integrează conștientizarea emoțională, autoreglarea, empatia și comunicarea constructivă. Lucrarea analizează alfabetizarea emoțională ca o problemă pedagogică generată de discrepanța dintre recunoașterea la nivel de politici a competențelor socio-emoționale și operaționalizarea lor insuficientă în practica din sala de clasă. Se susține că alfabetizarea emoțională reprezintă un cadru pedagogic transversal în cadrul învățământului primar, contribuind la dezvoltarea holistică a copilului și la consolidarea unui climat educațional pozitiv.

Cuvinte-cheie**:** *alfabetizare emoțională, inteligență emoțională, competențe socio-emoționale, învățământ primar, autoreglare, empatie, climat educațional, dezvoltare afectivă.*

Introduction

In a society characterized by rapid change, education can no longer be limited to the transmission of cognitive knowledge alone. In the document *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* (2015), it is stated that quality education must promote the social, emotional, and ethical competences necessary for responsible citizenship and social cohesion. UNESCO emphasizes that education should aim at the holistic development of the child, including the socio-emotional dimension. Although the term “emotional literacy” is not explicitly used, the document highlights the importance of developing non-cognitive competences, promoting students’ well-being, strengthening resilience, and fostering social responsibility. This indicates that emotional development is considered a systemic priority but it is not always clearly operationalized at the curricular level [28, p. 50]. Within the framework of the *OECD Study on Social and Emotional Skills* (2018; 2021), it is emphasized that socio-emotional competences are predictive of academic and professional success. Schools bear the responsibility for their systematic development, while educational policies should include clear mechanisms for implementation. However, the OECD [19, 20] also identifies a major challenge: although many educational systems acknowledge the

importance of socio-emotional competences, they lack coherent strategies for their effective integration into classroom practice. This discrepancy justifies the consideration of emotional literacy as a pedagogical problem rather than merely a theoretical or policy-level concern. Contemporary socio-educational transformations highlight the necessity of developing students' socio-emotional competences from the early years of schooling. Schools are expected to contribute to the holistic development of balanced individuals capable of self-regulation, empathy, and constructive communication [30, p. 144]. Emotional intelligence is widely recognized as a key factor in academic success, social adaptation, and psychological well-being. However, it does not develop spontaneously, but requires structured pedagogical intervention adapted to students' developmental characteristics.

In this context, emotional literacy emerges as a relevant pedagogical concept that extends beyond the simple recognition of emotions and encompasses the ability to understand, express, and regulate emotional experiences appropriately. When approached as an integrated educational process, emotional literacy fosters emotional awareness, reflective thinking, empathy, and adaptive regulation strategies. The development of emotional literacy in primary education represents a foundational dimension of student's holistic formation, influencing academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, classroom climate, and long-term life outcomes [26, p. 110]. Emotional literacy is not merely an auxiliary educational objective but a structural component of school readiness and adaptive functioning. In contemporary educational discourse, it is conceptualized as a mediating construct between emotional competence and educational outcomes. Emotional literacy enables students to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions in socially appropriate ways.

Methodology of Research

This article is based on qualitative theoretical research of a documentary-analytical nature. The study relies on a set of research methods applied to the analysis of international policy documents, psychopedagogical studies, and scientific works cited in the bibliography, with particular attention to the concepts of emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, emotional competence, and socio-emotional development in primary education. The selection of sources was guided by criteria of scientific relevance, conceptual consistency, recency, and applicability to the field of primary education. Special attention was paid to interdisciplinary contributions from psychology, pedagogy, and educational policy in order to construct an integrated interpretative framework. The methodological approach combines literature review, comparative analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and pedagogical conceptualization. These methods were used to clarify the conceptual boundaries of emotional literacy, to identify its structural dimensions, and to justify its status as a pedagogical framework for enhancing emotional intelligence in primary school students. Although the study does not include an experimental component, it systematizes existing knowledge and outlines directions for future empirical research.

Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Literacy and Emotional Intelligence

Introduced by Saarni C. (1999) conceptualizes emotional competence as the ability to manage emotional experiences within interpersonal contexts, emphasizing the developmental and relational nature of emotional functioning [24, p. 200]. Similarly, Denham S. (2006) demonstrates that early emotion knowledge predicts peer acceptance and social adjustment in school settings [7, p. 58-60]. From a pedagogical perspective, Steiner C. (1997) frames emotional literacy as a learnable set of competencies that can be systematically cultivated through educational practice. Emotional literacy functions as the operational and educational dimension of emotional competence, translating psychological constructs into teachable skills [26, p. 150].

Emotional development is recognized as central to personality formation. Bocoș M. (2013) emphasizes the role of formative education in shaping socio-emotional balance and adaptive behaviors in school-aged students. Likewise, Neacșu I. (2010) highlights the importance of self-awareness and reflective processes in the development of learner autonomy, implicitly reinforcing the pedagogical relevance of emotional literacy.

The conceptual development of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence has evolved within the broader framework of socio-emotional learning and competence-based education. Emotional intelligence is commonly defined as the ability to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotions effectively. The model conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a set of interrelated cognitive-emotional processes by Mayer J. and Salovey P. including emotion perception, emotional facilitation of thinking, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation [16, p. 10]. This model emphasizes the educable and developmental nature of emotional competencies.

Complementing the ability-based perspective, Goleman D. introduced a competence-oriented model that integrates self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills [10, p. 160]. While broader in scope, this framework significantly contributed to the pedagogical operationalization of emotional intelligence, particularly in school settings. Together, these models demonstrate that emotional intelligence should not be interpreted as a fixed personal trait, but rather as a dynamic construct that can be systematically developed through educational intervention.

The notion of emotional literacy emerged as a pedagogical response to the need for structured approaches to emotional development. Scholars such as Steiner C. (1997), Saarni C. (1999) conceptualizes emotional competence as a abilities that enable effective emotional functioning within social interactions [24, 26]. Denham S. (2006) further argues that early and consistent intervention during primary school years plays a critical role in strengthening emotional regulation and prosocial behavior [7, p. 59]. These perspectives underline the importance of integrating emotional development into formal educational practice.

Empirical research also highlights the relationship between socio-emotional competences and academic achievement, classroom climate, and school adjustment [10, p. 220]. From this standpoint, emotional literacy becomes not merely an auxiliary educational component but a foundational dimension that supports both learning processes and interpersonal functioning. In pedagogical context, emotional and personal development is recognized as a core objective of holistic education. Neacșu I. emphasizes the necessity of grounding educational interventions in developmental psychology to ensure age-appropriate formative strategies [21, p. 245], while Bonchiș E. highlights the dynamic and progressive nature of affective development during primary school years [5, p. 124]. These contributions reinforce the argument that emotional literacy must be aligned with developmental particularities and integrated systematically within instructional practice.

The research conducted by Zins et al. (2004), Jennings P. and Greenberg M. (2009), Heckman J. (2012) and Rieffe C. (2016), demonstrates that the development of emotional competencies constitutes a significant predictor of school adjustment and long-term success, underscoring the necessity of integrating emotional literacy into the curricular framework of primary education [1, 14, 12, 23]. From a curricular perspective, Guțu V. underscores the importance of transversal competences in contemporary educational frameworks [13, p. 199]. Emotional literacy may therefore be conceptualized as a transversal pedagogical dimension that intersects cognitive, social, and axiological domains. In parallel, Dandara O. stresses the axiological dimension of education, emphasizing the formation of values and attitudes as essential goals of schooling [19, p. 12]. Emotional literacy contributes directly to value internalization, responsible behavior, and constructive social interaction. Beyond descriptive conceptualizations, emotional literacy can be understood as a structured pedagogical process that facilitates the acquisition of emotional vocabulary, reflective capacity, adaptive regulation strategies, and empathic engagement. It operates within socially mediated learning environments where emotional understanding is co-constructed through guided interaction, dialogic practices, and experiential activities. Emotional literacy should be regarded not as a supplementary educational initiative, but as a foundational pedagogical framework that supports the systematic development of emotional intelligence and enhances the overall quality of the educational climate in primary school settings.

Emotional illiteracy as a Pedagogical Problem

The importance of emotional literacy in primary education represents a foundational dimension of student’s holistic formation, influencing academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, classroom climate,

and long-term life outcomes. Emotional literacy enables students to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions in socially appropriate ways. Saarni C. (1999) conceptualizes emotional competence as the ability to manage emotional experiences within interpersonal contexts, emphasizing the developmental and relational nature of emotional functioning [24, p. 58]. Similarly, Denham S. (2006) demonstrates that early emotion knowledge predicts peer acceptance and social adjustment in school settings [7, p. 88]. From a pedagogical perspective, Steiner C. (1997) frames emotional literacy as a learnable set of competencies that can be systematically cultivated through educational practice. Emotional literacy functions as the operational and educational dimension of emotional competence, translating psychological constructs into teachable skill [26, p. 44].

In Romanian educational research, emotional development is recognized as central to personality formation and school adaptation by Bocoș M. (2013) emphasizes the formative role of education in shaping socio-emotional balance and adaptive behaviors in school-age students, while Neacșu I. (2010) highlights the importance of self-awareness and reflective processes in fostering learner autonomy. These perspectives implicitly reinforce the pedagogical relevance of emotional literacy as a structured developmental framework. Within educational context, Sanda O. (2024) further argues that the development of emotional intelligence in primary school students requires intentional and systematically designed pedagogical intervention, identifying emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation as core competencies. These dimensions closely align with the conceptual structure of emotional literacy as a formative educational construct [29, p. 10]. In the absence of systematic pedagogical support, such competencies do not develop spontaneously or in a balanced manner. This deficit condition has been conceptualized by Steiner C. (1997; 2003) as *emotional illiteracy*, characterized by difficulties in recognizing, expressing, and constructively managing emotions, often resulting in relational dysfunction, poor conflict resolution, and maladaptive school behavior. From this perspective, emotional literacy emerges not merely as a desirable educational objective but as a preventive and corrective pedagogical response to the risks associated with emotional illiteracy in primary education [26, 27]. Emotional illiteracy in primary education may manifest through limited emotional awareness, inadequate self-regulation, and difficulties in empathetic communication, affecting classroom relationships and academic engagement. The main manifestations and relational consequences of emotional illiteracy, as synthesized from Steiner's perspective, are presented in Figure 1.

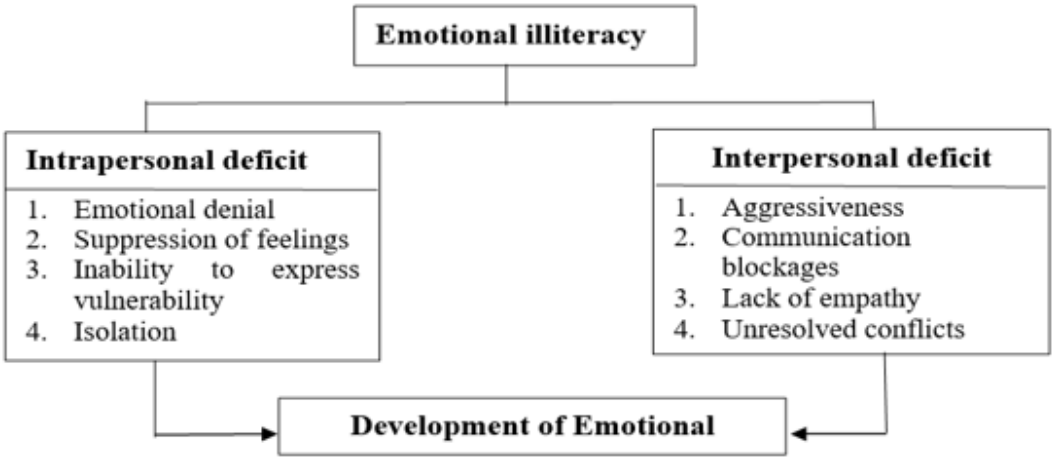


Figure 1. Conceptual model of emotional illiteracy according to Steiner Claude (2003)

The concept of emotional literacy was initially developed by Steiner Claude, who introduced it as a response to what he termed **emotional illiteracy** within contemporary societies. In his work *Emotional Literacy: Intelligence with a Heart* (2003), argues that many interpersonal and social difficulties originate from the inability to recognize, express, and manage emotions constructively [27, p. 54]. According to Steiner C., emotional illiteracy manifests through several behavioral patterns: emotional denial, suppression of feelings, inability to express vulnerability, and the tendency to replace authentic emotional

communication with aggression or withdrawal. He maintains that individuals who are emotionally illiterate often struggle with empathy, constructive dialogue, and conflict resolution. Emotional repression, in his view, does not eliminate affective experiences but distorts them, leading to relational dysfunction and social alienation.

Educational Implications of Emotional Literacy in Primary Education

Steiner C. conceptualizes emotional literacy as a set of learnable competencies that include emotional awareness, ownership of feelings, empathy, and the ability to repair emotional harm. He emphasizes that emotional skills are not innate traits that develop automatically with age; rather, they must be cultivated intentionally through guided interaction and reflective practice [26, p.23]. Emotional illiteracy, therefore, is not merely an individual deficiency but a socially reproduced condition sustained by educational systems that prioritize cognitive achievement over emotional development.

From a pedagogical perspective, Steiner's argument is particularly relevant. If emotional illiteracy leads to communication breakdowns, unresolved conflicts, and emotional rigidity, then educational institutions bear partial responsibility when emotional development is neglected. Steiner C. criticizes traditional schooling models that focus predominantly on intellectual performance while disregarding emotional competence. In such contexts, students may acquire academic knowledge but lack the emotional vocabulary and regulatory skills necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships. The phenomenon of emotional illiteracy is especially significant in primary education. Students who are unable to identify their own emotions or interpret the emotions of peers may experience frustration, social exclusion, or behavioral difficulties [12, p. 452]. Without structured pedagogical support, these patterns may consolidate and influence long-term adaptive functioning.

Steiner's framework suggests that emotional literacy should be approached not as an auxiliary educational component but as a foundational element of human development. The absence of systematic emotional education generates a pedagogical gap, reinforcing the argument that emotional literacy constitutes a genuine pedagogical problem rather than a purely psychological concern [18, p. 25]. In this sense, emotional illiteracy becomes visible in classroom settings through impulsive reactions, limited empathic response, difficulties in collaborative learning, and conflict escalation. Addressing these manifestations requires intentional pedagogical intervention aimed at fostering emotional awareness, responsible expression, and constructive relational repair. Thus, Steiner's conceptualization provides a theoretical foundation for understanding why emotional literacy must be integrated systematically within primary education: without it, educational systems risk producing academically competent yet emotionally underdeveloped individuals.

A substantial body of empirical evidence demonstrates the relationship between socio-emotional competencies and academic performance. In their meta-analysis of 213 school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, Durlak J. et al. (2011) report an average 11% improvement in academic achievement among participating students [8, p. 405-407]. Zins J. et al. (2004) argue that academic success is built upon the foundation of emotional regulation, attention control, and interpersonal skills [1, p. 3-5]. The mechanism underlying this relationship lies in the interaction between emotional regulation and executive functioning. Students who can manage frustration and anxiety demonstrate greater persistence, concentration, and task engagement. From a neuropsychological perspective, emotional regulation supports cognitive flexibility and working memory processes, which are essential for learning [17, p. 182].

Romanian educational psychology also supports this perspective Iucu R. (2014) underlines that effective classroom management and student engagement depend significantly on socio-emotional competencies [15, p. 104]. Furthermore, Pânișoară I. (2015) notes that emotional self-regulation contributes to intrinsic motivation and academic perseverance, reinforcing the integrative role of emotional literacy in instructional effectiveness [22, p. 190].

Emotional literacy plays a preventive role in reducing aggressive and disruptive behaviors. Eisenberg N. et al. (2000) demonstrate a negative association between emotional regulation and externalizing behaviors.

Students who lack emotional awareness often resort to impulsive or aggressive responses due to limited regulatory strategies [9, p. 137–139].

In their research, Rieffe C. and Camodeca M. (2016) demonstrate that deficits in emotional processing are associated with peer rejection and relational conflict. Emotional literacy programs equip students with constructive coping strategies, facilitating prosocial interaction and cooperative learning [23, p. 16]. Both Izard C. (2021) and Simonova O. (2022), although grounded in different disciplinary frameworks, converge in emphasizing that emotions represent structured processes influencing behavior, cognition, and social interaction. Their perspectives support the view that emotional literacy requires not only emotional awareness and regulation but also an understanding of the socio-cultural norms that shape emotional expression [30]. Within the Romanian pedagogical framework, Cucoș C. (2014) stresses the formative role of moral-emotional education in cultivating empathy and social responsibility. Emotional literacy contributes not only to individual adjustment but also to the ethical climate of the classroom community [5, p. 200].

Emotional literacy functions as a protective factor against anxiety, stress, and emotional vulnerability. Brackett M. and Rivers S. (2014), indicate that students with higher emotional competence report lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms [4, p. 369]. The OECD (2021), confirms that socio-emotional skills are strongly correlated with life satisfaction and well-being indicators [19, p. 32-35]. In contexts marked by social transition and educational reform such as Romania emotional literacy becomes particularly significant. Educational resilience depends not only on cognitive preparation but also on adaptive emotional functioning. As Bălan V. (2018) argues pedagogical discourse, the cultivation of emotional awareness supports students' adaptability in dynamic socio-cultural environments. Heckman J. and Kautz T. (2012) show that non-cognitive skills, including emotional regulation and perseverance, predict employability, income stability, and social integration more reliably than IQ alone [12, p. 451–455]. This perspective reframes emotional literacy as an investment in human capital development. In Romanian educational thought, Joița E. (2006) similarly emphasizes the formation of transversal competencies that extend beyond disciplinary knowledge and contribute to lifelong learning and social integration [17, p. 137].

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis confirms the pedagogical relevance of emotional literacy in fostering emotional intelligence within primary education. Emotional literacy emerges as a structured educational process that supports emotional awareness, adaptive regulation, empathy, and constructive communication. The discrepancy between educational policy recognition of socio-emotional competences and their limited systematic implementation in classroom practice justifies the conceptualization of emotional literacy as a pedagogical problem. Integrating emotional literacy as a transversal dimension of the primary curriculum may contribute to improving classroom climate, preventing interpersonal conflicts, and supporting students' holistic development. Therefore, emotional literacy should be regarded as a foundational pedagogical framework aligned with contemporary competence-based educational paradigms.

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