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The Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Training of Early Childhood Educators: A PRISMA Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capacity to identify and understand basic emotions in oneself and others. It plays a pivotal role in the professional training and performance of educators working at the preschool or early childhood level.

Objective: This study conducts a systematic review of literature published between 2020 and 2024, in both Spanish and English, to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the training of early childhood teachers and its subsequent impact on professional development and pedagogical practices.

Methodology: A literature review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement. The search was

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performed using the Scopus database, applying rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify, filter, and analyse high-impact articles relevant to the study.

Results: The review highlights the critical importance of emotional intelligence in teacher training, particularly as educators guide children through foundational developmental stages. The findings indicate that EI serves as a vital preventive factor against occupational stressors, such as anxiety and depression, which educators often experience in the classroom environment.

Conclusion: The literature confirms that emotional intelligence is a key variable in education, acting as both a preventive measure for teacher well-being and a cornerstone of professional development for those teaching children in their early years.

Unique Contribution: This study provides a comprehensive overview of how emotional intelligence influences preschool teachers' performance and student learning development. It emphasises that childhood is a critical stage where children develop social and emotional behaviours through observation and play-based dynamics established by the teacher.

Key Recommendations: Future research should incorporate additional variables such as job satisfaction, professional commitment, and the integration of digital resources—including artificial intelligence—as tools for teaching emotional literacy.

Keywords: Teacher training, Early childhood education, Emotional competence, Training programmes, Educators, PRISMA

Introduction

Emotional intelligence forms the basis of this study and is addressed from the context of teaching at the early years level. According to Fotopoulou et al. (2021), emotional intelligence is defined as the ability of human beings to regulate, perceive, and understand both their own emotions and those of others, thereby channelling information at cognitive and behavioural levels.

The education system faces changes and challenges in the administration of curriculum standards (Cunha, 2025) because teaching today is much more complex. Teaching is not only focused on the transmission of information; it also integrates skill development, thereby creating a meaningful learning context for students. Therefore, educators must provide environments conducive to the comprehensive educational development of their students. The incorporation of essential components in teaching the development of social-emotional skills, such as self-regulation, emotional awareness, empathy, and social skills, allows students to make better decisions in life, while also creating an appropriate academic atmosphere and, above all, enabling them to perform better academically (Zilva, 2023).

Various international organisations have promoted the integration of emotional intelligence and its components, highlighting its role in education. This is the case of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), which has addressed the issue in a study (Fragoso-Luzuriaga, 2015). As mentioned previously,

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progress has been made in the field of emotional intelligence, as explained by Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017), who define intelligence as the ability to identify with others and manage emotions, understood holistically, including the handling of difficult situations (e.g., health or national security crises). Therefore, the literature highlights the importance of identifying and managing emotions as a key factor in overcoming the complex challenges that arise in human beings during the school years. This type of competence strengthens interpersonal relationships among members of the school community, including parents, students, and faculty, with the aim of contributing to the educational success and well-being of the educational community.

Based on these premises, the development of teachers' socio-emotional skills is central to optimising educational attention in the classroom (Cejudo et al., 2015). An emotionally competent teacher, in addition to maintaining their own well-being, also contributes to the emotional health of their students (Mornar, 2024). Furthermore, identifying early signs of stress, frustration, or anxiety in students allows teachers to take preventive action in teacher-student relationships and promotes emotional self-regulation and conflict resolution.

From this perspective, it is necessary to make changes and transformations to auxiliary systems within educational systems, with careful consideration and reflection by the teaching team. Following this logic, each teacher has an active role at all levels and stages of a learner's life (Dirsa et al., 2022). Learning activities are rarely conducted outside of class, and instructors provide an immense amount of information per session. Such an instructor provides resources to a learner and bridges the gap between the learner and knowledge while skilfully fostering the development of professional and social (socio-emotional) skills. As noted, emotional intelligence (EI) is a crucial focus for ensuring a constructively warm and effective educational atmosphere (Kasperski & Hemi, 2024).

From the perspective of fields such as neuroscience, positive psychology, and education, emotions have been shown to be relevant to physical and mental health as well as to the development of a positive school environment. Consequently, teacher training in emotional intelligence should be understood as a key policy for developing life skills, as indicated by the Ministry of Education (2018). Empirical evidence has provided a basis for using EI in educational settings, highlighting its effectiveness in enhancing teaching practice (Rivas et al., 2025).

According to Akinola and Johnson (2025), it is important to develop programmes in the educational context to train emotional intelligence, or emotional competence, in teacher training. This is important for building healthy relationships between teachers and students and for improving social skills, among other things.

In this context, teacher training goes beyond designing and implementing lesson plans and transmitting knowledge. It is essential to develop skills that enhance training in emotional intelligence, as this allows teachers to stand out in their role as student mentors. Studies emphasise that professors are aware of the relevance of emotional intelligence, but there is nevertheless little intervention in the continuing training of teachers in emotional education. This highlights the need for validated tools that allow for the

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identification, evaluation, and monitoring of teachers' socio-emotional competencies (Cejudo & López-Delgado, 2017).

However, although there is support from international literature, such as the contributions detailed above, there is a need to channel investments into promoting emotional education for teaching staff as a fundamental mechanism for developing Ecuador's National Education System in order to avoid problems that are detrimental to the academic community (students, teachers, administrators). There is still a lack of studies that contribute to analysing the fundamental role of emotional intelligence in teacher training at the early childhood level. The main contribution of this study is to provide an updated overview of the literature from 2020 to 2024, summarising advances and limitations in teacher training in emotional intelligence in early childhood education, and offering key information for future practice to strengthen educational policies. Therefore, to address this gap, this study aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature examining the role of emotional intelligence in the training of early childhood teachers and its impact on professional development and pedagogical practices.

Methodology

In this research, with the aim of consolidating and integrating the literature and establishing the manuscript's structure, a systematic review was conducted using the PRISMA methodology to analyse studies on emotional intelligence in teacher training at the initial level of education. The literature review was conducted by searching for information between 2 February and 28 February 2025.

In this case, the Scopus database was chosen for the search because it was considered to meet high-impact information quality standards. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented to segment the search and analyse documents relevant to the established objective. These are detailed in Table 1. Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used to establish the search equation. The following description establishes the keywords that formed the search equation for this study. The following description establishes the keywords: ‘emotional intelligence’ OR ‘emotional skills’ OR ‘emotional competencies’) AND (‘initial level’ OR ‘early childhood education’ OR ‘preschool’.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria
• Studies on emotional intelligence in the training and performance of early childhood teachers. • Studies covering the period 2020-2024 • Studies in Spanish and English. • Full access to studies • Scientific article documents.
Exclusion criteria
• · Those who have no relationship • · Studies that have full access

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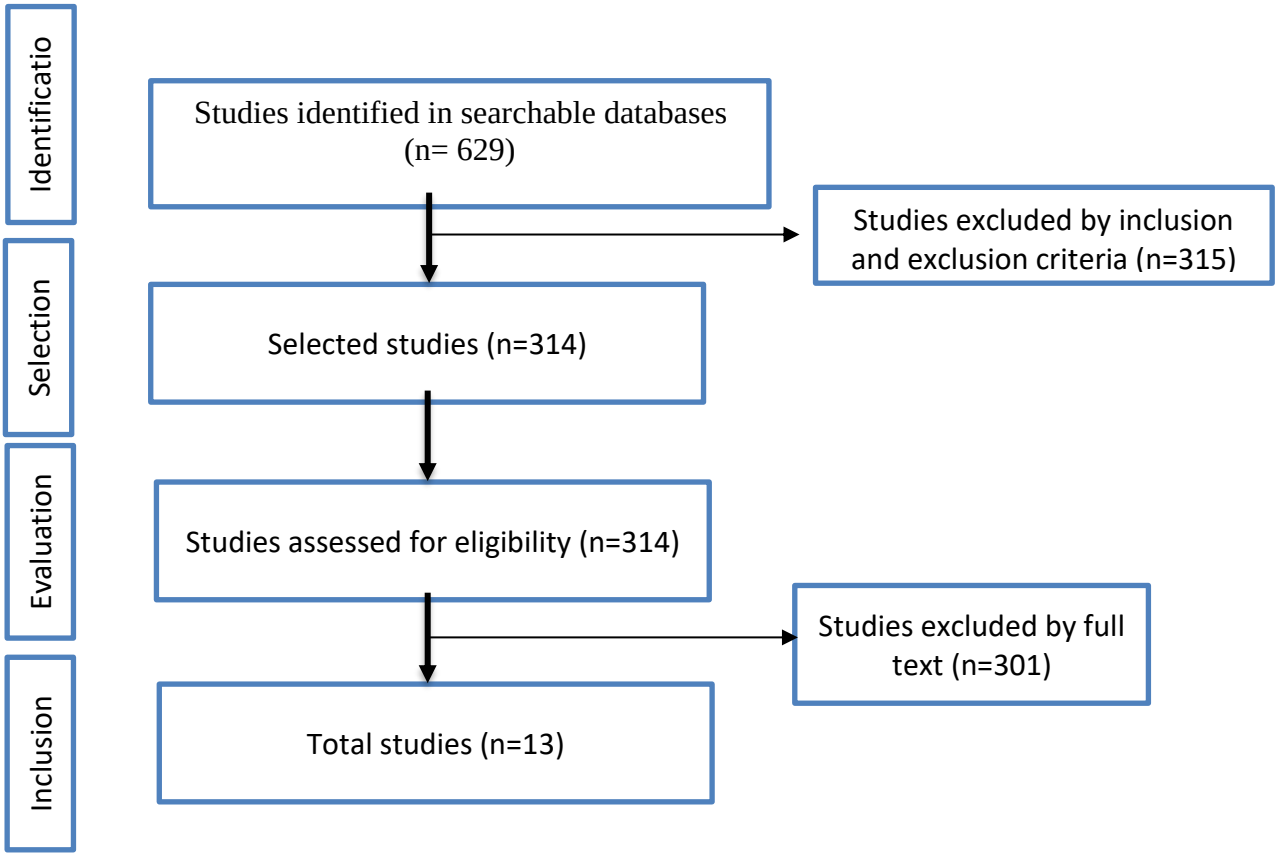
- · Population other than the one to be studied

Figure 1

Flowchart of the Prisma method



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Result

The results of the study is presented thus:

Table 2: Documents cited linked to the variables

N°	Authors	Methodology / Type of research	Sample/sampling	Results
1	(Hamer et al., 2024)	Experimental study	Cluster sampling/ 104 samples. 60 in the treatment group and 44 in the control group (Warsaw).	According to the study results, the control group of teachers showed growth in emotional skills: facilitation, knowledge, and regulation. The treatment group outperformed the control group in facilitation and emotional regulation skills.
2	(Acuña Gil & Leal Leal, 2024)	Qualitative approach / participatory action	36 teachers from northern Santander)	In this study, they emphasise the importance of emotional skills in teacher training for early childhood education, stating that, according to the working group, emotional effort is required, necessitating the application of innovative strategies in the classroom.
3	(Rósa, 2024)	Qualitative study	Case sampling, 7 teachers, in Sweden	Within the framework of this study, emotional learning is part of the curriculum, but it is limited in its civic and ethical dimensions. It emphasises that the plan focuses on developing social and emotional skills as a protective factor, rather than on teaching the educational community.
4	(Ye et al., 2024)	Quantitative approach	580, stratified random sampling from regions in Zhejiang Province (China).	This study examines the interaction of variables such as emotional competence, self-efficacy, and teacher experience to determine preschool teachers' performance, using a theoretical framework developed by Bandura, Goleman, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

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				According to the findings, emotional competence is a predictor of performance and self-efficacy. The key findings reveal that emotional competence significantly predicts teacher performance and self-efficacy, and contributes to teacher effectiveness. Therefore, it is essential to use training programmes that emphasise emotional competence and self-efficacy for teachers, who are important in the development of early childhood.
5	(Abdulkader & Al Naggar, 2024)	Quantitative approach, cross-sectional correlational design	, 140 preschool teachers.	Emotional intelligence, like creativity in preschool teachers, is a fundamental factor in the performance and quality of life of both students and teachers. According to the results, there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity in educators. It is recommended to use training programmes to create new lines of research, which in turn will allow teachers to improve their teaching, leading to better learning and better results for students. Finally, it was shown that factors such as age, level of experience and type of nursery school may be involved in creativity and its relationship with emotional intelligence, helping to improve both.
6	(Özdemir Cihan & Dilekmen, 2024)	Integrated mixed design. Quantitative: controlled quasi-experimental design with pre-test/post-test.	73 teachers, random probability sampling	In the results, when applying the teacher training programme, which was carried out using ANCOVA, a significant result was obtained, showing growth in emotional intelligence in the experimental group. Furthermore, similar studies support the idea that emotional intelligence variables can be refined or improved in educational practices for future teachers.
7	(Ouchen et al., 2023)	Qualitative	40 teachers working in public and private nursery and primary schools in the city of Marrakech	According to the study's findings, educators are aware of emotional intelligence in the classroom, but few integrate activities aimed at strengthening its acquisition. This study highlights the importance of implementing teacher training programmes with the aim of encouraging or promoting emotional skills. It

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				concludes with a reflection on an emotion-based pedagogical design that can contribute to the learning environment.
8	(Kotaman, 2023)	Mixed study	34 early childhood teachers, 13 treatment group and 21 control group .	Qualitative results revealed a positive long-term impact of emotional education on teachers' emotional regulation skills. Quantitative data support this finding. ANCOVA showed that children in the treatment group outperformed those in the control group in academic achievement.
9	(Carbonero-Martín et al., 2022)	Experimental design (pre-test and post-test) with a control group.	351 teachers in Ecuador, Manabí. 190 in the experimental group and 161 in the control group.	According to the results, in the age variables, between 30 and 50 years old, there was a significant difference in perception and emotional regulation. Furthermore, according to employment status, there were significant differences between those with temporary and permanent contracts. With the implementation of the emotional intelligence programme for teachers, there was a significant difference. In addition, they emphasise that when designing programmes, they must be adapted to the sociodemographic profile and work group, and the method applied must be flexible and tailored to the teacher's experience.
10	(Cheng et al., 2022)	Mixed design	The participants were 70 kindergarten teachers in China (mindfulness training group = 35; comparison group = 35). Qualitative approach, 24 people.	Classroom teaching and student development outcomes are linked to the well-being of educators. In addition, educators are exposed to stressful situations, especially early-stage teachers, due to their students' emotional turmoil. The results showed that in the mindfulness programme, the training group reflected positive results in EI, improving mindfulness and reducing symptoms of exhaustion and depression. In addition, the effectiveness of the Mindfulness programme in minimising the risks of psychological distress and exhaustion was demonstrated.

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12	(Ferreira et al., 2021)	Qualitative methodology	13 preschool teachers interviewed	According to the findings, teachers had a positive attitude towards social and emotional learning and were familiar with its theory, but had limited knowledge of SEL strategies. This highlights the need for training and competence development in SEL practices. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of implementing programmes, as this provides educators with a range of strategies when teaching their classes.
13	(Chica et al., 2020)	Hermeneutic approach, integrating mixed methods (qualitative, quantitative)	63 directors	According to the study's results, there is a lack of focus on emotional skills in teacher training. Furthermore, there is little intention to align training programmes with emotional education, highlighting a deficit in emotional training within teacher training.

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Discussion

Emotional intelligence is a concept that has attracted growing interest, particularly regarding individuals' lives and its potential to mitigate certain effects on human health. Emotional intelligence is based on an individual's ability to reflect on both their own emotions and those of others (Fragoso-Luzuriaga, 2015).

In accordance with the objectives set out and reflected in the results of this preliminary literature review, it was evident that emotional intelligence is an important factor in the educational context and in the training of teachers who are essential in working with children at the early stages, which requires a great deal of physical and emotional presence for the development of classroom activities.

It should be noted that, in addition to acquiring technical knowledge, it is necessary and essential for educators to develop soft skills, including emotional intelligence, or to include it in their professional training, given that they are immersed in working with children at the early stages of education, where effective guidance in emotional and social development is required. This will enable children to acquire the necessary skills to handle everyday situations at school, at home, and in society.

This study aims to highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in the training of early childhood teachers and in its development through classroom activities. This is similar to the literature review by Pollarolo et al. (2024), which emphasises the strategies preschool teachers use during play activities to help children develop skills and conflict-resolution abilities, among other things. In addition, they highlight the need to integrate technology with appropriate pedagogical strategies. For this reason, it is necessary to have well-trained educational staff, which aligns with the findings of Abdulkader and Al Naggar (2024) and Ouchen et al. (2023), who state that teachers must undergo continuous training to develop the necessary skills in children.

Likewise, the study conducted literature reviews in 2010 and 2021, analysing the implementation, development, and effectiveness of emotional intelligence programmes in teacher training at the early childhood and primary levels, with the aim of improving children's learning and the environments in which they carry out their activities. According to the literature, training in emotional intelligence remains limited. This is related to the study by, which mentions that although teachers are aware of the importance of EI and its theoretical foundations, there is a gap in social and emotional learning strategies, which highlights the need for teacher training on EI and its role in child development in different areas (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Finally, according to Rósa (2024), emotional intelligence training for early childhood teachers is sometimes promoted as a protective factor for educators. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on both preventive aspects for teachers and experts in the development of emotional skills or competencies in children, as mentioned by Martínez-Saura et al. (2024), who mention in their study that it is necessary to have a variety of instruments for their measurement.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, through a systematic review of the literature, it was possible to demonstrate the relevance of emotional intelligence (EI) training and its impact on both teachers' well-being and the development of skills in preschool children. It is necessary to have educational staff trained in different areas, especially in EI, given the importance of childhood in the life of every human being, as it is during this stage that children acquire and develop the skills necessary for their academic and personal development.

In addition, the results showed that the Mindfulness programme is an alternative in teacher training and that when designing a training programme, it is necessary to know certain characteristics: the level of training, years of experience, and age range of the children to be worked with. This will help to design and implement the programme, which will contribute to reducing stress and anxiety among educators and improving student learning.

Finally, more longitudinal studies or other lines of research are needed to allow for other types of approaches in order to contrast new realities in the world, especially in Latin America and Ecuador in particular, in relation to teacher training in education, in which other types of variables can be integrated, such as self-efficacy in the classroom, leadership, burnout, and anxiety.

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Ethical Approval: It was not necessary to obtain ethical approval for this study, as it did not involve human or animal subjects; instead, a systematic review of the literature was conducted.

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I.M.T.T. conceived and designed the study. **I.M.T.T., L.K.B.M. and C.M.M.G**. carried out the literature search, study selection and data extraction. **I.M.T.T. and C.M.M.G**. analysed and synthesised the evidence. **I.M.T.T**. drafted the first version of the manuscript. **M.Y.S.L., L.K.B.M**. and **C.M.M.G**. critically reviewed the manuscript, and **M.Y.S.L**. supervised the development of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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