

# A theoretical approach to early childhood education and its relation to the emotional development in early childhood

## Una aproximación teórica de la educación infantil y su relación con el desarrollo emocional en la primera infancia

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### SUMMARY

*This research is the result of a doctoral thesis in Education Sciences, to conduct a documentary review on child and emotional development, based on the selection of scientific documents at an international and national level (Colombia) that address this topic. The methodology is qualitative documentary analysis, using a comparative matrix that contains information from the processing and searches for standards, studies, and research into 2016 or 2021 in academic and indexed databases (Scopus, Dialnet, Google Academic, and Scielo). The findings show a central category “Early childhood education and its relationship with emotional development”, supported by two subcategories “the family as an influence on child development” and “emotional development”, which emerge from the analysis of 52 academic documents. Among the conclusions, it is highlighted that the family is a central axis in the development and learning processes to guarantee emotional well-being*

*and, therefore, the educational quality of children in early childhood.*

**Keywords:** *Early childhood, child development, emotional development, education, family*

### RESUMEN

*Esta investigación es el resultado de una tesis doctoral en Ciencias de la Educación, con el objetivo de realizar una revisión documental sobre el desarrollo infantil y emocional, a partir de la selección de documentos científicos a nivel internacional y nacional (Colombia) que abordan este tópico. La metodología es cualitativa de análisis documental, utilizando una matriz comparativa que contiene información a partir del procesamiento y búsqueda de normatividad, estudios e investigaciones encontradas desde 2016 a 2021, en bases de datos académicas e indexadas (Scopus, Dialnet, Google Académico y Scielo). En los hallazgos se evidencia como categoría central “La educación infantil y su relación con el desarrollo emocional”, sustentada por dos subcategorías “la familia como*

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*influencia en el desarrollo infantil” y “el desarrollo emocional”, las cuales surgen del análisis de 52 documentos académicos. Entre las conclusiones se resalta que la familia es un eje central en los procesos de desarrollo y aprendizaje para garantizar el bienestar emocional y por ende, la calidad educativa en los niños y niñas de la primera infancia.*

**Palabras clave:** *Primera infancia, desarrollo del niño, desarrollo emocional, educación, familia*

## INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Fund, early childhood development comprises three phases: from conception to birth; from zero to three years of age; and from three years of age to school entry. These phases are characterized by the need to guarantee children’s health, nutrition, protection, and positive stimulation through family support and quality learning spaces in educational establishments, which should have a timely impact on children’s comprehensive development. In this understanding, development is multidimensional since it deals with physical, mental, and emotional well-being, which differs from the context and culture of family upbringing. Consequently, this process mobilizes humanity, the state, and organizations to reflect on how to improve their conditions (1).

On the other hand, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2) defines early childhood as the period from birth to eight years of age, a unique process of brain growth in which children are influenced by their environments and contexts. In terms of education, it should be noted that the United Nations (3) states in the fourth goal of sustainable development are the quality of education, which seeks to ensure equity and inclusion from early childhood. Therefore, one of the goals of this objective for the year 2030 is to certify that all children receive quality service in care and development during this stage, as stated in one of the main objectives of UNICEF (1), where the comprehensive development of the child should prevail. In this sense, it is necessary to think and create suitable and timely learning environments for the development of this population, being essential to reflect on the conceptions that are

held, in child and emotional development, so that the guiding actions towards these processes have the expected results.

In relation to the above, the initiative arises to develop the present research that aims to conduct a documentary review on child and emotional development, from the selection of scientific documents at the national (Colombia) and international levels that address this topic. In accordance with the objective, this article is relevant to the extent that it is appropriate to analyze the different studies that have been conducted in various contexts, to identify, analyze and reflect on how child and emotional development have an impact on the integral formation of early childhood. Therefore, the findings of this research will reveal the needs, problems, challenges, and challenges that teachers, parents, and infants must face during the formative process of students that is built in the classroom and the family. In this sense, this research would be a great contribution to people, organizations, and researchers committed to this topic, since it is a documentary x-ray that allows seeing reality more comprehensively.

Not reflecting on the research work developed in recent times on the subject in question would prevent counteracting the social gaps and, therefore, the conditions of vulnerability in which the most disadvantaged children in society are immersed (4). His research states that political, economic, and social problems generate poverty, which leads to the fact that many children do not receive adequate support and prevents them from reaching conditions similar to those of their peers, whose basic needs are met (5).

Juxtaposing this stage of development can have repercussions on future problems such as low academic performance, absenteeism, school dropout (6), and low developmental potential (7). Therefore, the family and the school play an important role in this process. Bisquerra et al. (8) state that the family context is the ideal space for the development of emotional competencies. And the family socio-demographic conditions, the educational level, and the economic income of the parents indicate unfavorable actions for the development of children (9). Therefore, it is essential to rethink the importance of the family and the influence of emotional development in early childhood

education. In this sense, the school context, as Gómez (10) considers in his research on early childhood and emotional education, is a guiding space capable of contributing to the development of students' capacities; therefore, the programs are projected from the emotional formation to train in competencies for life, building a balance between the cognitive and emotional aspects (11). Likewise, Nikkola (12) refers to the analysis of the Finnish educational system, highlighting the importance of educational planning, which is routed from the central objective of pedagogy, i.e. from the emotionality, capabilities, needs, and interests of children, therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to know the fundamental objectives of early childhood education.

#### **CHILD AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Referring to the term development entails understanding a process of constant reconstructions and reorganizations that children experience, considering the different variables that may occur in their performance over time, and showing possible advances and/or setbacks. The development comprises three characteristics: the first refers to a non-linear social, affective, linguistic, and cognitive development, referring to an irregular process, where children may or may not advance; the second characteristic denotes that development does not have a definitive beginning, therefore, it does not start from zero; and third, development does not conclude or does not have an end (13).

Child development is the result of the integration between genetics and the stimuli that children receive from the social and family context, significantly affecting socializing experiences, stimulating abilities, parenting patterns, and affection, where adequate development will favor children's skills and competencies (14). Therefore, development can be integral and interrelated between the psyche and consciousness to reorganize and benefit the physical and emotional growth of the child (15).

On the other hand, emotional development is a process in which the child builds aspects related to his or her identity, security, self-esteem, and confidence in himself or herself and the

environment, through meaningful relationships established with peers (16). In this process, emotions are identified to manage them and to know how to express and control them, which implies a conscious and unconscious exercise of the self. As reflected in the following concept: Emotional education is a process that permanently occurs throughout life. Its objective is to highlight/emphasize the development of emotional competencies as a basic model of personal development, to prepare/skill them for life to improve their well-being, both personally and socially (17).

Likewise, emotional competencies as the set of knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to become aware of, understand, express, and appropriately regulate emotional phenomena (18), thus constructing a pentagonal model of emotional competencies made up of five blocks: emotional awareness - emotional regulation - emotional autonomy - social competence - life skills and well-being (19). These competencies must be formed in the same order to ensure that the person develops a complete process in emotional education.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The present research is of qualitative approach and documentary type since the procedure involved search, systematization, and analysis of electronic documents published from 2016 to 2021. The units of analysis were all those documents that address two groups of categories (family as an influence on child development, and emotional development), found in the Scopus, Dialnet, Google Scholar, and Scielo databases. The search considered descriptors in English (child development, emotional development, early childhood) and Spanish (desarrollo del niño, desarrollo emocional, primera infancia), using the UNESCO thesaurus as a reference. In order to broaden the document search, the descriptors are combined in different ways. In the first exploration, a total of 14 224 documents written in the form of articles were found among the four databases, which were preselected according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, finally choosing 13 articles from each database, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Classification of articles

Database	Initial screening	Pre-selection	Final selection
Scopus	3 580	38	13
Dialnet	2 456	62	13
Scielo	3 928	56	13
Google Scholar	4 260	78	13

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected according to the need and convenience of achieving the analysis pursued by the literature review (20), understanding by these criteria the opportunity to help strengthen the academic and methodological quality of the studies, identify the

required population, and analyze the applicability of the results (21). In this sense, Table 2 describes the inclusion of criteria necessary for the topic of this research and, at the same time, the exclusion of some criteria that allow delimiting the intentionality of this literature review.

Table 2  
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Academic articles published in indexed journals.	Academic articles published in indexed journals.
Studies resulting from early childhood research involving educational agents.	Studies, results of papers in non-indexed journals.
Published between 2016 and 2021	Papers that do not address the topic of early childhood.
Be part of the databases researched	Published before 2016
Papers in non-indexed journals.	Papers that require payment to access them
Papers that do not address the topic of early childhood.	
Published before 2016	
Documents that require payment to access them	

Source: Own elaboration

To systematize the documents, a database was created in Excel, with the following sections: title of the article, author, year, journal, journal information, keywords, research problem, objectives, research methodology, description and sample size, instruments used, results, and thematic core. Subsequently, the documents were grouped, and two categories emerged: family as

an influence on child development and emotional development. This allowed meta-analysis from the thematic nuclei, common and divergent aspects among the selected documents, through a rigorous and constant comparison exercise. Finally, recommendations, hypotheses, and conclusions were made that invite investigation and reflection on child and emotional development in early childhood.

**RESULTS**

The research articles show important results on the need to contribute to child and emotional education, showing in different contexts the recognition of children as subjects of rights who

require timely and intentional accompaniment to fully develop their vital needs (22). Figure 1 describes the total (n=52) of selected articles, where 25 % (n=14) are national (Colombia) and 75 % (n=38) are international, including 23 % (n=12) of articles published in a language other than Spanish.

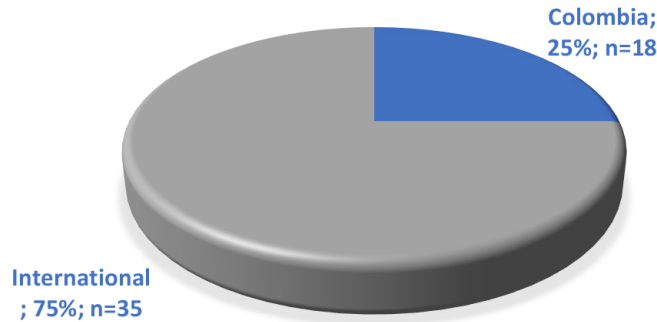


Figure 1. Classification of items according to location.

**Note:** Percentage of articles selected at national (Colombia) and international levels.

Regarding research approaches, it was found that 69.2 % (n=36) used the qualitative type, 26.9 % (n=14) corresponded to quantitative studies, and 3.8 % (n=2) to mixed studies. In relation to population groups, six studies with a large sample of children stand out: i) analysis of the Early Childhood Development-DIT module in the national health and nutrition survey of 3 892 Mexican children aged 0-59 months with respect to the topic of health, development, and well-being (23); ii) the evaluation of the early childhood development index and the level of language development of 2 937 Mexican children (24); iii) use of data from the Early Childhood Development Index-ECDI from the last ten years, collecting information from 99. 222 four-year-old children, in the topics of cognition and socioemotional in 35 low-income sample countries (7); iv) evaluation of the results of the implementation of the Pisotón program in the psycho-affective development in 6.08 Colombian children aged three to seven years, through Düss' fables (25); v) how early childcare affects the development of German children marginalized by

social and family circumstances, using a sample of 61 625 children (26) and vi) evaluation of the level of learning and development of 5 005 Chilean children in the dimensions of cognition, motor skills, language and socioemotional (14).

A high percentage of investigations used samples of 106-307 subjects from 0 to 6 years of age, among which the following stand out: i) surveys of 171 Russian children from 5 to 6 years of age with their respective parents to analyze the theories of parenthood and the understanding of children's emotions (27); ii) evaluation of a diagnostic test on child development in which 224 Colombian children from 2 months to 5 years of age participated together with their parents (28); analysis of emotional competencies and comparison of the influence of the child's sex on the emotional development of 123 Spanish children (29).

A smaller percentage of investigations made use of samples of 8 to 44 subjects of note are: i) the application of the qualitative assessment scale of child development and the socio-family

characterization card to analyze the child and emotional development of 21 Colombian 5-year-old children (30); ii) analysis of the self-regulation processes of learning of 8 participants between 4 and 6 years of age (31). Finally, other studies refer to bibliographic reviews with searches of scientific articles related to the topic of child and emotional development in early childhood. On

the other hand, to carry out the content analysis of the studies, the synthesis of the 52 articles was taken up again and then taken to a word cloud (generated by the Atlas.ti 9 program), finding prevalence in early childhood education, emotional development, children, childhood, learning, competencies, and skills, as reflected in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Word cloud from the synthesis of the articles studied.  
 Note: Words that emerge from the Atlas.ti 9 software and that stand out from the syntheses in each article analyzed.

The above is related to the analysis of the documents, which allowed identifying as the main category “Early childhood education and its relationship with emotional development” which is supported by two subcategories: “the

family as an influence on child development” and “emotional development” these, in turn, are implicit in the similar areas of study with the number of articles that support the bibliographic exercise, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
 Analysis of categories and subcategories of the documents

Main category	Secondary categories	Áreas	#Art
Early childhood education and its relationship to emotional development.	The family as an influence on child development	Unfavorable conditions for early childhood development.	8
		Family, contexts, and early childhood	16
	Emotional development in early childhood education	Assessment of early childhood development	11
		Educational quality in comprehensive early childhood development	17

Source: Own elaboration

**DISCUSSION**

The main findings of the studies showed a correlation between early childhood education and emotional development, evidencing the

importance of the family as the first educational agent in these processes, and the need to generate an effective alliance between the family and the school as a formative space in the integral development of the child (Figure 3).

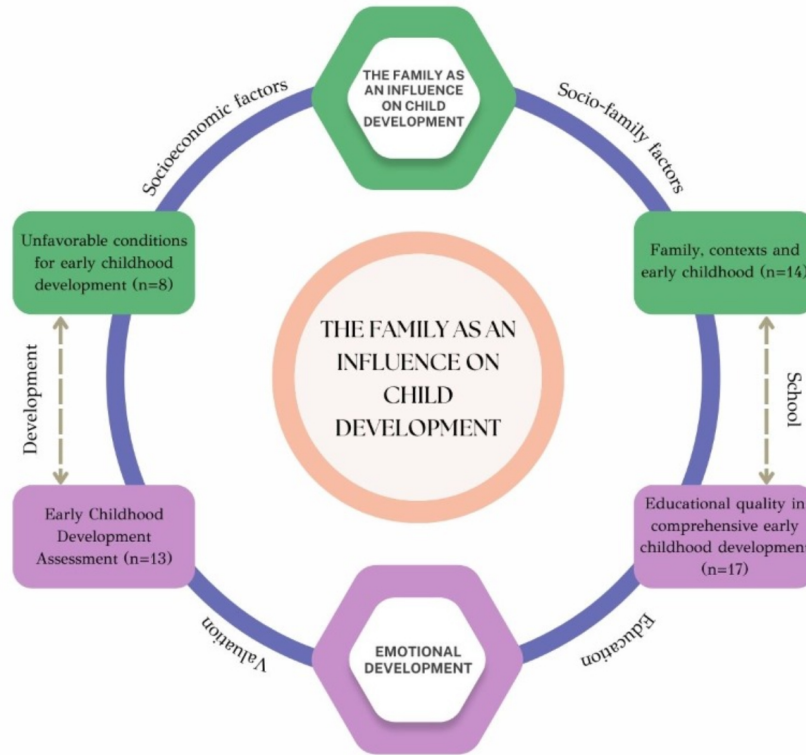


Figure 3. Correlation of categories of analysis.

Note: The above graph shows the close relationship between emotional development and the family as an influence on child development, where the referents: socioeconomic factors, development, assessment, education, school, and socio-family factors, coexist to articulate the areas: unfavorable conditions for early childhood development; family, contexts and early childhood; evaluation of early childhood development and educational quality in comprehensive development. The above, allows us to glimpse that in the research the topic that stands out is the family, perceived as the main socializing agent, where the academic training of the parents, the type of family, and the socioeconomic factor influence the favorable or unfavorable life trajectory of the children.

Different studies have shown that the use of applications, scales, and surveys aimed at children and their caregivers have made it possible to evaluate cognitive, motor, socioemotional and communicative development, and alterations in child development (14,23,28,32,33), resulting in new pedagogical proposals, innovative learning tools and targeted and intentional educational material for early childhood.

Child development is a dynamic process that generates physical and emotional changes, which are reflected in children's experiences according to the context in which they develop. For Astudillo and Leppe (34) it is a continuous process that allows the acquisition of skills in the motor, cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional areas. In addition, it is a stage of special care that must guarantee the quality of the educational

service in the first years of life (35). For this reason, it is a central axis of public policies for early childhood (36), where children have been recognized as an essential stage to contribute to their well-being, as well as to the present and future of society. However, some conditions do not favor the expected child development, which generates notable social differences among them.

According to the above, among the unfavorable conditions for early childhood development, the following are highlighted: (i) influence of parenting on early cognitive and emotional development, attributing that parents who are not involved in the upbringing of their children, cause in them less competencies in the understanding of emotions (27); (ii) parents who assume authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, which have repercussions in inappropriate social and educational consequences (37,38); (iii) family dysfunctionality, with low levels of parental education and precarious socioeconomic conditions that affect the socioemotional skills of children (26) the disconnection between the family and the school, the lack of time and dedication to children and family violence imply the development of unhealthy behaviors, as well as poverty and malnutrition, leading to child stunting (7,40); this last aspect is a human suffering due to the abandonment in which many children find themselves, who do not have the option of choosing where and with whom to grow up in healthy and affective spaces.

In line with the above, the Regional Observatory of Early Childhood in Colombia has found that the quality of pedagogical processes is deficient and out of step with the processes of child development. In addition, the role of the family has been delegated in many cases to educational establishments (41), situations that today are reflected in the insistence on the link between the protective environments for early childhood known as the family, the state and society, who are obliged to guarantee harmonious transitions, initially from home to school (42). Paradoxically, a year and a half ago (due to the COVID-19 health emergency), the home was forced to become a school learning environment, demonstrating the possibility of overcoming barriers in teaching, if not also an emotional and social crisis within the family (43). However, the levels of inequality became more visible,

since not all families have had the minimum conditions to cope with the situation of learning at home because of the pandemic, this situation has caused the family to resignify and readjust to the new circumstances, where this: It is the scene of the most important relationships and fundamental experiences of life. Hence, we need a united family, that together shares the daily joys or afflictions, that the difficulties, achievements, and criteria of some are shared by all members, and that does not impose conditions, where respect prevails for family growth (44).

The socio-family factor plays a fundamental role in the integral formation of the child since interpersonal relationships dynamize transformation processes in their personal growth. In this way, the socioeconomic aspect is not a determining factor, because the main task of the family is the commitment to accompany, care for and protect the integral development of children, assuming the changes that occur in social and cultural contexts, which require generating an alliance with the school, through assertive communication, to carry out principles such as empathy, otherness, solidarity and especially the practice of socioemotional competencies.

The implementation of programs for psycho-affective and emotional development has shown that after the interventions with children and their families, proposals are made to reorganize the training in emotional education, considering tools that allow resolving emotional conflicts in childhood (25). Thus, the proposals that arise from emotional education for the first years of life are mainly advantageous and necessary because it is a stage that is naturally socializing with their peers (45), hence the importance of allowing childhood interactions where they can recognize themselves as participatory subjects of society, and that from their individuality they begin to recognize the other.

Likewise, evaluations of maturational development in preschool children are fundamental (46) and have led to the conclusion that the greater the socio-affective development of a child, the greater the exploration skills and adaptive faculties will also be, providing tools for a free, spontaneous, safe and open to learning development (47). Therefore, valuing child development leads to reflecting on how, from



the task of being parents, it is possible to provide affection and security so that their child can then go to school and find in this new space learning opportunities with pedagogical intentionality that contributes to the aforementioned equivalence.

Regarding the quality of education in the integral development of early childhood, the importance of the protective environment of the family is reiterated to the extent that it provides children with appropriate verbal and emotional interactions so that the lag in their development is lower (14). When moving on to the school environment, a teacher is required who can intentionally provoke the learning of socioemotional competencies, facilitating the formation of secure and independent human beings. Thus, the link between the triad of students, teachers, and family must be solid to leave a mark in the formation process (48). Because students express a wealth of emotions that need to be intervened in the coexistence with others. Therefore, the teacher should not focus only on the cognitive aspect, since juxtaposing the socioemotional aspect (49) would be sowing in arid lands, limiting the possibility of the new generations to actively participate in this indolent society, which needs people with affective competencies to reduce the inequality gaps, and to make otherness a universal principle (50).

### CONCLUSION

It is found that a large percentage of the research addresses the issue of the family as a transversal axis in the processes of infant and emotional development of children, which has repercussions in the subsequent stages of the life cycle. Therefore, educational processes should be rethought in favor of an integral education that contributes to the biopsychosocial transformation of the human being. Requires that both the family and teachers are trained in the acquisition of competencies that transcend from the cognitive to the emotional. To the extent that every human being should have the opportunities to develop to the fullest, regardless of their social, economic, physical, cognitive, religious, or political, among others; leading the school to be a potentializing agent that counteracts the gaps of inequality,

educating from love, gratitude, and happiness.

The documentary review reveals some gaps, among the most relevant of which is the absence of public policies in some countries that promote comprehensive training in the development of emotional competencies, a problem that is most prevalent in the early childhood education stage. In this sense, it is important to continue researching this topic that involves governmental and non-governmental entities.

Likewise, the analysis of the documents highlights the importance of studying the different social, family, and educational contexts in which early childhood develops, since the level of affectation is proportional to the favorable social conditions, the protective environments, and the pedagogical spaces, which should be appropriately designed for the integral development of children; In this sense, it is necessary to think about the construction of support networks that allow the different early childhood promoters to strengthen cooperative work to safeguard the growth and development of this population in their first years of life.

The findings found make visible the problems of early childhood education and the affectation on their emotional development, being submerged in social and economic inequalities, which alter the welfare and life project of each child, affecting in the medium and long term their development of personal, emotional, social and physical dimensions.

Finally, this documentary review presents a social and educational reality, which invites us to rethink the challenges of early childhood education, since, despite the existing international and national legislations in written form, it is necessary to reflect on the real transformations that require these spaces where children are immersed, such as family and school, to generate strategies that strengthen this alliance to improve living conditions in early childhood in every corner of the world.

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