
SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD - PLAYFUL-PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Abstract

In a Hispanic educational context, a significant gap persists regarding the integration of emotional teaching practices to Spanish language speakers. Although its importance is recognized, existing proposals tend to be isolated or merely symbolic. It is urgent to make a transition towards a school culture in which children's emotional development becomes a specific, visible and sustained priority within the curriculum. In response to this need, this study aims to identify, analyze and synthesize research focused on the use of playful-pedagogical strategies to strengthen socioemotional skills in childhood. A qualitative approach using a literature review model was adopted in order to do this. Ninety percent of the studies published between 2020 and 2025 in validated academic databases were selected, prioritizing documents that articulated play and emotional education on a childhood level. The search was conducted through combined equations of relevant key words. The analysis of 50 documents allowed noting a methodological variety approach, with a predominance of a qualitative approach (90%). Experiences in countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Chile and Argentina were identified. The topics were grouped into three main areas: student-centered socioemotional education, effective teaching practices, and playful strategies as a means for emotional development. The findings revealed that the play enhanced skills such as self-regulation, cooperation and decision-making. Furthermore, it highlights the need to adapt these strategies to specific cultural contexts to achieve a major impact. In conclusion, the playful component emerges as a key tool for fostering a more human and integral education.

Keywords: *Playful-pedagogical strategies, good teaching practices, childhood education, socioemotional abilities.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of socio-emotional skills in early childhood continues to be relevant in the educational field, given its direct impact on the integral formation of children and their preparation to face the challenges of daily life. These competencies not only strengthen emotional self-regulation and empathy, but also lay the foundations for harmonious coexistence in school and social contexts. In this sense, early childhood education is configured as a strategic space to promote these skills from an early age.

Playful-pedagogical strategies are understood as teaching methods that integrate play with educational intentionality, offering significant opportunities for the construction of affective and social learning. Bravo, et al., (2021) argue that

playful-pedagogical strategies represent creative tools that, when applied by the teacher, not only facilitate significant learning, but also enhance the various developments. These allow children to interact, express emotions and resolve conflicts in a creative and cooperative way. On the other hand, socio-emotional skills comprise a set of skills that include the recognition of one's own and others' emotions, the management of frustration, responsible decision-making and the construction of healthy relationships.

Recent studies confirm the importance of developing social and emotional skills in the initial stage of the human being. According to Soriano (2025), the promotion of socio-emotional competencies in early childhood plays a key role in the comprehensive growth of children. Linking these contents becomes an important tool to influence the direct way in which they learn, behave and relate to others. In addition, it not only strengthens their emotional health, but also boosts their school performance.

Similarly, various studies have supported the effectiveness of these strategies in educational contexts. For example, Bisquerra (2011) stresses that interpersonal relationships are deeply mediated by emotions, reinforcing the need to address them pedagogically from early childhood. Likewise, Pacalla, et al., (2025) highlight that the implementation of playful strategies in educational contexts favors the acquisition of emotional competencies in children, promotes social interactions based on mutual respect and contributes to the consolidation of comprehensive well-being with future projection.

However, despite the recognition of its importance, in educational practice in Latin America there are still limitations in the systematic implementation of playful strategies aimed at socio-emotional development. Evidence shows that many children enter primary education with difficulties in managing their emotions or interacting adequately with their peers, which can have a negative impact on their adaptive process in the educational environment. This is the case of Aguirre A, et al., (2022) who concluded that it is essential to create programs that strengthen socio-emotional skills from childhood, since many children face difficulties managing their emotions and establishing healthy relationships, which impacts their performance and school adaptation. Likewise, Oviedo & Espinosa (2025) state that playful strategies are key to enhancing emotional self-regulation and favouring relationships between peers, essential elements for an adequate school adaptation in the early stages.

Similarly, another important challenge is the lack of longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term impact of these strategies. This situation highlights a gap in the literature regarding how and which playful-pedagogical strategies are being used in the region for socio-emotional purposes, as well as the urgent need for more in-depth and sustained research.

Against this background, this study proposes a literature review that allows identifying, classifying and analyzing the playful-pedagogical strategies used in Spanish to promote socio-emotional skills in early childhood education. The objective is to make successful practices visible, provide theoretical references and offer recommendations to strengthen the socio-emotional dimension in pedagogical proposals aimed at early childhood.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on the guidelines of the literature review model, which allowed for an organized and reflective exploration of the parts of existing research on the subject. According to Sabatés & Sala (2020), literature review is an essential component in any research process, as it allows the study to be contextualized within the existing field of knowledge and to support it from theoretical and conceptual foundations built by previous research. This type of review is not necessarily based on systematic criteria for the selection or evaluation of sources, but is characterized by more open searches, guided by opportunity or thematic interest.

This proposal was made with the aim of identifying, analyzing and synthesizing relevant studies on the application of playful-pedagogical proposals to enhance socio-emotional skills in childhood within the Spanish-speaking educational context.

Inclusion criteria were defined as those publications between 2020 and 2025 (at least 90% of the sources), academic writings available in validated databases such as Scopus, Dialnet, Redalyc, SciELO and Google Scholar. Likewise, research was included that explores the implementation of playful methodologies for pedagogical purposes, linked to the strengthening of socio-emotional skills at the child level.

Those writings that do not present information based on applied research or clear theoretical foundation on the subject were excluded. Similarly, research that deals with educational levels other than early childhood education was excluded, as well as documents that mention the key words, but do not address the relationship between play and socio-emotional skills directly.

For the search process, recognized digital databases in the academic field such as Dialnet, Google Scholar, Redalyc were used, the search strategy included combinations of keywords such as: "playful-pedagogical strategies", "socio-

emotional skills", "early childhood education", "play in learning" and "emotional development in children". They also used search equations such as: ("Playful-pedagogical strategies" AND "Socio-emotional skills" AND "Early childhood education") ("Playful-pedagogical strategies" AND "Socio-emotional skills" AND "Habla Hispana") Table 1 below presents the information search protocol.

Table 1. Information search protocol

Academic databases	Keywords	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion Criteria
-Redalyc -Dialnet -Google Scholar -Scopus -SciELO	-Playful-pedagogical strategies. -Socio-emotional skills. -Early childhood education. - Play in learning. -Emotional development in children.	-Publications and research that specifically address issues related to pedagogical strategies for the development of social and emotional skills. -Articles in Spanish. -Publications with a qualitative, quantitative or mixed approach.	-Publications with a qualitative, quantitative or mixed approach. -Publications that, despite containing the search terms or combination of them, do not contain information of interest. -Publications whose contexts are not educational. -Publications of cases in non-Spanish-speaking contexts.

Note: Search strategies used in databases.

The review allowed the selection of 50 eligible studies. These included research articles, theoretical reviews, postgraduate theses and master's degree projects. The selection was made in three phases: reading the title, reviewing the abstract and evaluating the entire content. In each stage, the previously defined criteria were applied.

For the organization of the information, an analysis matrix was prepared in which the following aspects were recorded: title, author, year, type of document, database, approach, language, methodology, thematic category, key results and conclusions. After the selection of the articles, the studies were grouped into three major emerging categories: socio-emotional education in the student, good practices and successful methodologies in the classroom, and playful-pedagogical strategies for emotional development.

This systematization allowed to generate a broad vision of current trends, methodologies used and most relevant findings on the subject of study.

RESULTS

After applying the literature review model, a total of 50 studies were collected that aligned with the criteria already instituted. These publications were analyzed and categorized according to the recurring themes, methodological approaches and significant contributions to the social and emotional growth of infants during the initial school stage through playful-pedagogical methodologies. Likewise, some specific playful proposals were categorized, as well as the categorization of emerging socio-emotional skills.

With respect to methodological approaches, 65% of the studies analyzed correspond to qualitative studies, 25% correspond to mixed approach research and the remaining 10% are quantitative studies. This qualitative predominance reflects the interest in exploring the experiences, perceptions and attitudinal changes that were the result of the application of the various playful-pedagogical strategies in real educational contexts.

In geographical terms, the studies reviewed have their origin mainly in countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Chile and Spain, which facilitates an advanced vision of educational practices in the Spanish language. The vast majority of the studies were published between 2019 and 2025, which guarantees that the information analyzed is trending.

Below is a table with the countries and the number of studies for each, as well as the years of publication. Next, the table with the categorized studies will be released.

Table 2:
 Categorization of countries.

Country	Number of studies by country	Years of publication
Ecuador	15	2023-2025

Spain	5	2019 – 2024
Chile	1	2022
Colombia	12	2029 – 2024
Costa Rica	1	2015
Mexico	9	2019 – 2025
Peru	6	2021-2024
Uruguay	1	2020

Note: *Own elaboration*
 The final sample of the selected studies allowed us to identify that countries such as Ecuador and Colombia lead studies on the development of socio-emotional skills in early childhood education.

Table 3
Categorization of studies

General Category	Subcategory	Authors	Contributions from the authors	Approach
Importance of socio-emotional education in the classroom	Early childhood and primary education	-Bisquerra R. (2011)	The researchers highlight how important it is to include the socio-emotional dimension in early childhood and primary education, emphasizing the fundamental role of playful dynamics in the development and/or enhancement of emotional and social skills. They agree that the implementation of playful methodologies not only favors students' emotional self-regulation and social interaction, but also requires structured integration into the curriculum and adequate teacher training to ensure their effectiveness in the classroom.	Qualitative
		-Bolaños, E. (2020)		
		-Oviedo B.& Espinoza J. (2025).		
		-Soriano, M (2025).		
		-Román et al., (2022)		
		-Aguirre, et al., (2022)		
		-Campoverde, et al., (2023)		
		-Malavé, et al., (2024)		
		-Herrera (2019)		
		-Pérez and Filella (2019)		
		-Moyolema et al., (2024)		
		-Gómez, et al., (2024)		
		-Lira et al., (2022)		
		-Arango (2024)		
		-Fermoso (2019)		
-Hoyos & Rivero (2022)				
-Ureña & Peralta (2023)				
Good practices and successful methodologies in the classroom.	Impact of playful-pedagogical strategies on children's learning.	-Jurado R, et al., (2022)	The writings analyzed coincide in highlighting that the implementation of pedagogical practices focused on socio-emotional development positively transforms the educational experience in childhood. Together, these contributions allow us to conclude that each of the playful, collaborative methodologies focused on the child's emotionality not only enrich the teaching-learning processes, but also allow the	Qualitative
		-Tello, et al., (2021).		
		-Peña G (2021)		
		-Arias c. (2019)		
		-Cruz P. (2014)		
		-Grijalba et al., (2021)		
		-Belmonte (2022)		
		-Aragundi & Game (2023)		
		-Hernández et al., (2024)		
		-Aguirre, et al., (2021)		
-Trujillo, et al., (2020)- Ardila & Cruz (2023)				
-Fiallos (2024)				

		<p>foundations of a comprehensive education that accompanies affective, social and cognitive growth from the earliest years.</p>
<p>Playful-Pedagogical Strategies for Emotional Development</p> <p>Play, emotional didactics and creative strategies</p>	<p>-López, et al., (2024). -Zambrano (2024). -Ponce, et al., (2025) -Zúñiga, et al., (2024) -Zamora, et al., (2023) -González, et al., (2023) -González, et al., (2021) -García et al., (2025) -Moyón (2025) -Aucasi G. (2021) -Loor & Meza (2022) -Anchundia & Vega (2024) -Armies, et al., (2024) -Díaz, et al., (2023) -Díaz & Duque (2020) -Lizano & Pereira (2015) -Montenegro (2023) -Pacalla, et al., (2025) -Bravo (2021) -García, et al., (2023)</p>	<p>According to the authors, playful dynamics applied for educational purposes are essential to promote emotional and social competences in childhood. Using play as a resource and playful activities, children have the opportunity to explore, express and manage their emotions, as well as learn to interact and collaborate with others. These practices promote skills such as empathy, positive interaction, reconciliation between parties and self-regulation, which are essential for their social and emotional well-being. The authors agree that the implementation of these strategies from early childhood education favors comprehensive development, creating a safe and dynamic learning environment that promotes both emotional growth and the social skills necessary for a successful adaptation in their school and social environment.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Qualitative</p>

Note: Own elaboration

The final sample of the selected articles on playful strategies to enhance socio-emotional skills in childhood allowed us to identify three major thematic categories.

Importance of socio-emotional education in the classroom

In an increasingly diverse world, the development of various social and emotional skills has become a priority for the integral formation of human beings. That is why Bolaños (2020) argues that the development of this competence is essential for life, since it involves recognizing, expressing, and adequately managing both one's own and those of others, as well as building healthy interpersonal bonds.

In the educational field, the development of the aforementioned skills has become a fundamental component for the integral formation of the child. These skills not only promote self-knowledge and self-regulation, but also allow healthy bonds to be established with others, which is key in socialization processes from an early age. In this sense, Bisquerra (2011) states that: "Socio-emotional skills constitute a set of competencies that facilitate interpersonal relationships. Social relationships are interwoven with emotions" (p. 26).

For his part, Soriano (2025) states that including socio-emotional education within the school curriculum offers as its main benefit the strengthening of students' capacities to cope with stress and resolve conflicts in a positive and reflective way. Hence the urgent need to create and apply innovative strategies that not only entertain, but also generate learning in each experience. There are some key elements for the student to create and enhance the necessary skills to

have assertive results. These elements not only facilitate academic learning, but also contribute to the child's personal and social development. In this sense, it is necessary to implement pedagogical and recreational strategies that respond to the different needs of students, especially in the school start. This perspective is supported by the approaches of Oviedo & Espinoza (2025), who argue that playfulness, the construction of emotional skills, and collaborative learning are effective and significant strategies for strengthening social and affective skills in childhood. These practices, when incorporated into the classroom, favor self-regulation, empathy, cooperation and conflict resolution, fundamental aspects for harmonious coexistence and the emotional and integral well-being of children. Thus, a more inclusive, participatory, and humanizing educational environment is promoted, where learning transcends the cognitive and becomes a transformative experience.

Good practices and successful methodologies in the classroom

With respect to good practices and successful methodologies in the classroom, Rodríguez Ardila & Cruz (2023) in their studies show the fundamental role that teachers play in children's socio-emotional development. Likewise, practices were identified where teachers through various activities and/or collaborative games reinforce this learning addressed in the classroom. For their part, Jurado, et al., (2022) highlight the importance of methodologies that integrate the self-regulation of their emotions, being part of the educational process, where learners will be able to recognize, manage, and express themselves appropriately in a school context. In this order of ideas, Tello (2021), Pérez (2019), and Hernández (2023) can be cited, who manage to show how socio-emotional skills are strengthened from the teaching work, thus creating an impact beyond academic performance, since other areas such as relationships are covered. This means that, within educational institutions, a transformative impact can be generated, not only in academic performance, but also in relationships, and the social part of students; that is, in the various areas of development. In general, these studies allow us to identify significant experiences that promote a positive school climate and also the integral development of the child.

Playful-pedagogical strategies for emotional development

As for what is related to this category, the studies that not only describe, but also implement innovative playful proposals such as cooperative, symbolic, role plays; emotional corners, theater and story workshops. Among which we find the one presented by Trujillo (2020) and Pacalla (2025) who argue that these strategies are presented as effective and competent resources to integrate the social-emotional with the curricular content in an innovative, significant and at the same time motivating way.

However, López, L, et al. (2024) argue that play and playfulness are presented as pedagogical strategies that not only strengthen, but also revolutionize the traditional teaching model, offering innovative and meaningful experiences in which the toy acts as a catalyst for knowledge. In this way, children learn in a fun, natural and spontaneous way, promoting a more dynamic and creative approach to learning. This statement allows us to recognize that these two elements are not only didactic resources, but that they can constitute true pedagogical bridges capable of energizing and transforming the classroom. In this context, the child actively participates where he or she not only gets involved, but also explores, discovers, experiences and builds knowledge spontaneously, enhancing his or her emotional and cognitive development.

For his part, Zambrano (2024) argues that the playful activities applied by educators are fundamental for the construction and development of emotional self-regulation in students. Through strategies such as cooperative games, songs, varied teaching materials and reading, which contributes to the enrichment of interpersonal relationships, self-esteem and emotional self-regulation. These skills are essential to students' emotional well-being and personal success. This approach highlights the importance of playful activities in the emotional formation of students, particularly in childhood. In the educational field, cooperative games and other playful strategies encourage the development of social and emotional skills such as empathy and self-regulation, which are essential for a balanced learning environment. These practices not only stimulate thinking, but also strengthen children's well-being and active participation by generating an affective and respectful school climate.

Table 4 Categorization of playful-pedagogical proposals

Playful proposals	Author	Social-emotional skill that is strengthened
Co-op games	Moyón et al., (2025)	Collaboration and teamwork skills.
Music	Bisquerra R. (2011)	Emotional regulation and expression of feelings.
Symbolic play	García, et al., (2024)	Emotional imagination and understanding of social roles.
Role-play	García, et al., (2023)	Perspective taking and communication skills.

Theatre of emotions	Ponce et al., (2025).	Peaceful resolution of conflicts.
Storytelling workshop	Zúñiga et al., (2024)	Emotional identification

Note: Own elaboration

Playful-pedagogical proposals that strengthen socio-emotional skills in childhood.

Table 4 summarizes a set of pedagogical proposals based on playful strategies, highlighting their authorship and the socio-emotional skills that they seek to strengthen in the participants. Each initiative is framed in an innovative educational approach, where play and creativity act as key tools for integral development.

Co-op games

It is worth mentioning Moyón et al. who highlight the importance of cooperative games, which not only promote collaborative work and group interaction, but are also fundamental for the construction of healthy interpersonal relationships. These games create a space in which students acquire skills to coexist, attend with respect and accept different points of view, which strengthens group cohesion. In addition, they promote the acquisition of interpersonal skills, including emotional understanding, assertive communication and the peaceful resolution of disagreements, essential skills for a harmonious and constructive learning environment.

Music

Another relevant strategy is the one presented by Bisquerra (2011), who states that music plays a crucial role in the process of emotional regulation, since it offers a way for the expression of feelings through rhythm and melody. By connecting with emotions, music allows students to externalize their emotional experiences in a safe and healthy way. In addition, its therapeutic power contributes to reducing stress, anxiety and other negative emotions, creating an environment conducive to learning. Music, therefore, is not only a tool for enjoyment, but also a key pedagogical strategy for the emotional well-being of students.

Symbolic play

In relation to symbolic play, García et al. (2025) point out that symbolic play is an engine of cognitive and emotional development, as it allows children to explore different social roles and fictitious situations, which promotes and enhances imagination and creativity. This type of play helps children understand social dynamics, improve their communication skills, and increase their problem-solving skills. By depicting scenes from everyday life or imaginary worlds, children gain important knowledge about their environment and about human emotions, enabling them to face and understand real experiences more deeply.

Role-play

In this same sense, García, et al., (2023) emphasize that role-playing is a powerful pedagogical strategy to develop perspective-taking and effective communication skills. By assuming different points of view, students learn to understand the diverse realities of others, which favors the development of active empathy. This type of play not only allows children to put themselves in each other's shoes, but also promotes reflective thinking and conflict mediation in a more understanding and respectful way, strengthening social interactions in various contexts.

Theatre and emotions

Among the strategies found, it is worth adding the one presented by Ponce et al. (2022) who present theater as a fundamental pedagogical tool for emotional development, since the dramatization of everyday situations facilitates the peaceful solution of problems. Through representation, students learn to manage their feelings constructively and to reflect on their behavior in social situations. Theatre, by integrating the emotional component, also encourages self-knowledge and reflection, helping children to make more conscious and ethical decisions in their daily lives.

Storytelling workshop

The implementation of storytelling workshops, according to Zúñiga, et al., (2024), strengthens several skills in children, such as identification, empathy, and assertive communication. By connecting with the characters' experiences and feelings, students gain greater emotional awareness of both themselves and those around them. In addition, the narratives enable children to experience difficulties through symbolic representations, offering a safe space to explore solutions and reflect on values such as respect, friendship and solidarity.

The in-depth analysis of the selected sources allows us to identify a convergent trend around the formative value of playful-pedagogical strategies in the promotion of socio-emotional skills during early childhood. Various studies agree that the mediation of play, collaborative activities and emotionally safe environments are effective practices to promote skills such as self-regulation, empathy, active listening and harmonious coexistence. It is also observed that those educational experiences that integrate play with an intentional focus on emotional development have a positive impact on the school climate and on the strengthening of affective and social bonds among children. In this sense, the methodologies analysed not only enrich learning processes, but also consolidate comprehensive training focused on

child well-being and the construction of educational environments that are more inclusive, sensitive and respectful of the child's needs.

Emerging socio-emotional skills identified from playful-pedagogical proposals.

Table 5 Categorization of Emergent Social-Emotional Skills

Emerging Social-Emotional Skills	Authors
Fostering empathy and communication	-García, et al., (2025) -García, et al., (2023)
Exploration and expression of emotions	- Bisquerra (2011) -Ponce, et al., (2022)
Strengthening cooperative work	-Moyón, et al., (2022)
Conflict resolution from values	-Ponce, et al., (2022)
Imagination as a mediator of social-emotional learning	-García, et al., (2025) -Zúñiga, et al., (2024)

Note: The categorization of emerging socio-emotional skills is derived from the selection of the most representative findings of the literature review on playful-pedagogical strategies in early childhood education.

Fostering empathy and communication

This skill refers to the child's ability to recognize and understand his or her emotions and those of others, express his or her own, and build healthy interpersonal relationships. According to García, et al., (2025), symbolic play favors the development of empathy by allowing infants to put themselves in the shoes of others through role play. In turn, García, et al., (2023) argue that role-playing stimulates expressive language and active listening, fundamental tools for assertive communication. The constant interaction promoted by these games fosters an environment of respectful dialogue, which strengthens relationships between peers.

Exploration and expression of emotions

This dimension is essential for self-regulation. The literature analyzed emphasizes that music, theater, and stories are powerful means for affective expression. Bisquerra (2011) states that music facilitates the identification, release and management of emotions, by offering a highly evocative non-verbal channel. Likewise, the author argues that the story workshop stimulates introspection and allows children to name and understand their emotions, by identifying with the characters. For their part, Ponce, et al., (2022) highlight dramatization as a technique that provides a safe space to express complex emotions in a symbolic way.

Strengthening cooperative work

Cooperative work involves skills such as respect for each other's ideas, shared decision-making, and co-responsibility in the execution of tasks. Moyón, et al., (2022) show that cooperative games strengthen emotional bonds, while promoting solidarity and joint conflict resolution. These activities involve social learning where sharing, negotiating and acting collectively are taught. In addition, they promote group belonging and a sense of community, essential aspects for harmonious coexistence in school contexts.

Conflict resolution from values

Beyond the simple mediation of conflicts, this skill is framed in an ethical perspective that values respect, justice and empathy. In this sense, educational theatre and dramatisation emerge as strategies that allow real conflict situations to be represented and solutions based on values to be tested. Ponce, et al., (2022) stress that these practices favor moral reflection, by promoting dialogue, understanding of the consequences of actions, and respect for different ways of thinking. Thus, a critical conscience is formed from an early age.

Imagination as a mediator of social-emotional learning

Imagination plays an integrating role in socio-emotional development, as it allows children to project themselves in diverse scenarios, explore new possibilities and construct meaning. Symbolic play and stories are privileged resources for this purpose. García, et al., (2025) state that imagination, activated by play, drives processes of empathy, emotional reflection, and creative thinking. Montenegro (2023), on the other hand, links narrative imagination with the understanding of complex emotional realities, making the story an emotional and cognitive experience at the same time. Imagination, in this context, is not evasion, but a deep construction of the emotional self.

DISCUSSION

The present study shows that playful-pedagogical strategies occupy a central place in the promotion of socio-emotional skills in early childhood education in the Spanish-speaking context.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this review have important implications for teachers and educational institutions, bearing in mind as mentioned by Aguirre, E. E. S (2021) in his systemic review in which he concludes that emotional intelligence is fundamental in early childhood education and that its development favors learning,

coexistence and the general well-being of students. First, research suggests that continuous teacher training in playful methodologies is essential to ensure effective implementation. As Arango (2023) points out, playful strategies not only benefit students, but also empower teachers, providing them with tools to create inclusive and dynamic learning environments. G Malavé-Domínguez (2024) also recommends in his research the implementation of specific educational programs and teacher training to improve the teaching of emotional skills in the first years of schooling. In addition to the above, Lira et al, (2022) sustain the fundamental role of the teacher when considering the relevance of integrating the development of emotional skills from the curricular design to the specific organization of each class session. In this order and direction, Aragundi & Game (2023) highlight a crucial aspect, and that is the importance of having teachers who have emotional faculties or skills, which makes it easier to manage their emotions, thoughts, and relationships in order to be able to intervene in a timely and appropriate way in the child population. Hence, the importance of having competent teachers, capable of transforming diverse scenarios. In addition, the need to integrate these strategies into the school curriculum in a systematic way, instead of limiting them to extracurricular activities, is evident. This requires a cultural shift at many institutions, where the traditional focus on academic skills often relegates social-emotional development to the background.

Likewise, the practices reviewed highlight play as a natural language that allows children to explore their emotional world, establish bonds with their peers, and strengthen fundamental values for coexistence, which is key to comprehensive education from the earliest years.

The analysis of the research reveals a significant consensus on the transformative role of playful-pedagogical strategies in strengthening emotional and social competencies in early childhood. For example, studies such as those by López et al. (2024) and Zamora et al. (2023) highlight how play-based activities not only improve competencies such as cooperation and decision-making skills, but also promote an environment where children can explore, experiment, and learn autonomously. These conclusions coincide with the idea that play is a natural means for children to promote essential skills, from emotional regulation.

However, what makes this body of research unique is its focus on specific Spanish-speaking contexts. An example of this is Moyón, et al, (2025) who show that about 80% of the students with whom playful strategies were implemented showed significant progress in the recognition and management of their emotions, in teamwork and in decision-making with autonomy. In addition, experts in the area validated the proposal, highlighting its applicability and positive results. This suggests that, although playful strategies are universal in their effectiveness, their implementation must consider cultural and social factors to maximize their impact. In relation to the latter, Campoverde (2023) after applying various playful strategies in 4-year-old children argues that, by implementing innovative pedagogical strategies aimed at the development of emotional regulation, such as role-playing, storytelling, emotion recognition and relaxation exercises, teachers observed a more harmonious coexistence in the classroom, as well as an improvement in children's ability to manage stress and anxiety.

The results of the studies reviewed transcend the purely pedagogical field, connecting with disciplines such as psychology and neuroscience. Bisquerra (2011) advocates a comprehensive approach that combines theories of emotional regulation (intelligence) with innovative educational practices. This approach is in line with the findings of Looor & Meza (2022) who highlight the importance of play in the initial stage of the human being by saying that early childhood represents a crucial stage in development, in which children in early childhood need to be surrounded by love, affection, security and adequate stimulation. The quality of these experiences will have a direct impact on the formation of their adult personality. Armijos, et al. (2024), agree with the above by demonstrating how gamification can be a powerful tool to promote skills such as empathy and self-regulation. In this context, play becomes a fundamental element, since through it significant influences and stimuli can be generated for their integral growth.

In the same vein, the integration of techniques such as conscious breathing and assertive communication, mentioned by Peña (2021), reinforces the idea that socio-emotional learning is not only an academic objective, but a holistic process that involves body, mind, and emotions. This interdisciplinary perspective opens up new possibilities for rethinking how educational curricula are structured in the region.

Despite the obvious advances, the review also reveals certain contradictions and challenges. In this sense, González et al., (2023) emphasize that the success of structured and gamified activities lies in their ability to promote students' interest, participation, and emotional commitment, thus favoring meaningful and lasting learning. On the contrary, López et al., (2024) underline the value of free and spontaneous play to promote creativity and autonomy, highlighting that this type of experience allows children to explore, experiment and build learning autonomously, respecting their individual rhythms and strengthening their development.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the intentional implementation of playful-pedagogical strategies has a positive impact on the socio-emotional development of children of infant age. Play, in its various forms, should not be understood only as a recreational activity, but as a powerful didactic resource that favors emotional, ethical and

relational learning. This perspective is especially pertinent in the Spanish-speaking educational context, where social and cultural demands require comprehensive training proposals that place socio-emotional development at the center of the children's curriculum.

In summary, this review confirms that playful-pedagogical strategies are an invaluable tool for the development and/or enhancement of socio-emotional skills in early childhood education. However, it also underlines the importance of approaching this issue with flexibility, creativity and an interdisciplinary approach. By combining theory and practice, and by recognizing the particularities of each educational context, it is possible to forge a future in which children not only acquire academic skills, but also the ability to understand themselves and those around them.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature review allowed to identify, analyze and synthesize various experiences and studies on the use of playful-pedagogical strategies to enhance socio-emotional skills in childhood, within the Spanish-speaking educational context. The findings allowed us to categorize the information into three main axes: student-centered socio-emotional education, good teaching practices in the classroom, and playful-pedagogical strategies focused on emotional development. Each category evidenced the relevance of the playful component as a transformative tool within the teaching-learning processes.

The proposals identified reflect how creativity in the classroom can become a bridge to promote skills such as empathy, assertive communication, emotional self-regulation, teamwork and conflict resolution from an ethical and value-based perspective. In addition, children's imagination stood out as a fundamental element in socio-emotional development, allowing children to explore their emotions and strengthen their bonds with others.

These findings reveal that play not only favors meaningful learning, but also acts as a vehicle for connection between the child's internal world and the educational environment. Through play, the child not only learns academic content, but also discovers himself, recognizes his emotions, understands those of others and develops essential social skills. In other words, play has the potential to be an engine for integral learning, deeply aligned with advances in neuroeducation, which highlight that learning is better when emotions are involved.

Despite this evidence, a notable scarcity of research at the graduate level that delves into the relationship between play and socio-emotional was identified, which limits the development of more solid and innovative proposals from the academic field. Most of the works found corresponded to undergraduate levels, which suggests a gap in educational research that should be led by master's and doctoral programs. This lack is also reflected in teacher training, which often does not sufficiently contemplate preparation in socio-emotional skills or the pedagogical use of play as a central strategy.

This suggests an urgent need to rethink not only the curricula in early childhood education, but also the initial and continuous training of teachers, as well as the priority lines of research in educational faculties. Emotional education, accompanied by active and playful methodologies, must cease to be an optional complement to become a transversal part of the curriculum and daily teaching practice.

In this sense, educational institutions have the responsibility to promote training spaces and sustainable projects where the emotional and the pedagogical go hand in hand. It is not only about implementing isolated workshops or celebrating specific dates about coexistence, but about building a school culture in which the emotional care of the child is a permanent priority. This implies allocating adequate time, resources and teaching support so that the proposals do not remain in theory or good intentions.

At the institutional level, it is urgent to recognize that this issue is not a simple complement, but an essential dimension of the integral development of children. It is not enough to mention it in speeches or research: it is necessary to integrate it in a concrete way into the pedagogical work, through strategies and projects visible within the curriculum. Childhood does not wait; Emotional learning is built from the earliest years and is strongly reflected in adult life. It is time to move from saying to doing.

Overall, this review reaffirmed the importance of continuing to research, innovate and share meaningful experiences that show how play, far from being just entertainment, can be a powerful way to form more empathetic, conscious and emotionally healthy human beings. The commitment to play is also a commitment to a more humane education that is coherent with the real needs of children.

To conclude, we can indicate that the analysis of the literature also opens multiple avenues for future research such as those mentioned below:

Influence of cultural and socioeconomic differences on the effectiveness of play strategies, role of families and communities in reinforcing skills outside the classroom, How do digital technologies influence gamification and the development of socio-emotional learning?

Deepening these proposals could enrich and help build a more complete perspective of how playful-pedagogical strategies can be adapted to different contexts and needs.

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