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## Development of a Conceptual Model of Emotional Literacy Education in Preschool Children Using an Integrative Development–Emotional Approach

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The objective of this study was to design a comprehensive conceptual model of emotional literacy education for preschool children based on an integrative developmental–emotional framework.

**Methods and Materials:** This study employed a qualitative research design conducted in preschool educational settings in Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation and included preschool teachers, administrators, child psychologists, developmental psychologists, educational counselors, and curriculum specialists. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and systematic document analysis of preschool curricula and emotional education guidelines. Data analysis followed thematic analysis with grounded theory procedures, including open, axial, and selective coding, supported by constant comparative analysis. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail.

**Findings:** The analysis produced an integrative conceptual model structured around sequential developmental-emotional domains including emotional awareness, emotional expression, emotion regulation, empathy development, social interaction skills, and consolidation of competencies across contexts. The findings demonstrated that emotional literacy develops through dynamic interactions among instructional inputs, relational pedagogy, peer socialization processes, contextual moderators, and family–school continuity. Emotion regulation emerged as a central mechanism linking emotional understanding with social competence, while environmental and relational conditions were identified as critical moderators of effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** The proposed model provides a coherent theoretical and practical framework for advancing emotional literacy education in preschool children and offers clear implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and early childhood educational policy.

**Keywords:** Emotional literacy; preschool education; emotional development; socio-emotional learning; early childhood curriculum; developmental–emotional model



## 1. Introduction

The preschool period represents one of the most sensitive and formative stages of human development, during which foundational emotional, social, and cognitive capacities are established that shape later academic achievement, mental health, interpersonal competence, and adaptive functioning across the lifespan. Contemporary developmental science increasingly recognizes emotional literacy as a core developmental domain that is inseparable from cognitive growth, social competence, and behavioral regulation, particularly during early childhood when neural plasticity, emotional sensitivity, and learning receptivity reach their peak. Emotional literacy refers to the child's capacity to perceive, label, understand, express, regulate, and use emotions constructively within interpersonal and learning contexts, forming the psychological infrastructure for later self-control, empathy, cooperation, creativity, and resilience. Large-scale international research demonstrates that preschool children who acquire structured emotional competencies exhibit higher school readiness, reduced behavioral problems, and more stable social relationships, whereas emotional skill deficits are strongly associated with disruptive behavior, academic disengagement, and psychosocial vulnerability in subsequent educational stages (Kukushkina, 2023; Romenkova, 2024).

Recent empirical findings further indicate that emotional competence is not a spontaneous developmental outcome but rather a learned and socially scaffolded process that depends on the quality of educational environments, adult-child interactions, pedagogical strategies, and institutional policies. Preschool education therefore carries a unique responsibility for deliberately cultivating emotional literacy as a fundamental learning domain rather than treating it as a secondary byproduct of general instruction. Studies examining emotional development across diverse educational settings demonstrate that intentional emotional education significantly enhances emotional awareness, regulation capacity, and social functioning in preschoolers (Bădău & Trifan, 2022; Rus et al., 2024; Yu & Ahmad, 2025). These findings collectively reinforce the necessity of moving beyond fragmented emotional activities toward comprehensive models that integrate emotional growth into the full architecture of early childhood education.

Within this evolving scholarly landscape, researchers have increasingly emphasized that emotional literacy must be conceptualized as an integrated developmental system encompassing emotional awareness, expression, regulation,

empathy, and social participation, rather than as isolated skills taught independently. The developmental-emotional perspective proposes that emotional competencies unfold sequentially yet interactively, beginning with the recognition and labeling of basic emotions, progressing toward meaning-making and bodily awareness, and ultimately supporting complex regulatory and relational functions. Empirical work on emotional identification and verbal expression among preschoolers demonstrates that emotional language acquisition forms the cognitive foundation upon which higher emotional competencies are constructed (Koltcheva & Popivanov, 2025; Motsiou & Valetopoulos, 2022). Complementary neurodevelopmental evidence further indicates that children's ability to decode facial expressions and situational emotional cues is central to adaptive emotional functioning and social engagement (Li et al., 2023).

In parallel, contemporary educational psychology underscores that emotional competence is deeply embedded within relational contexts. Adult emotional styles, teacher responsiveness, classroom climate, and peer interaction patterns function as continuous regulators of children's emotional learning trajectories. Empirical validation of the Crèche Educator Emotional Style Questionnaire highlights that teachers' emotional modeling significantly predicts children's emotional stability and regulation capacity (Chang et al., 2025). Moreover, environmental features such as classroom design, physical comfort, and sensory conditions exert measurable influence on both teacher and child emotional states, thereby shaping the emotional ecology of preschool institutions (Guan, 2023). These findings converge to illustrate that emotional literacy emerges not only from curriculum content but also from the broader emotional architecture of educational systems.

The instructional methods through which emotional literacy is cultivated have likewise undergone significant transformation in recent years. Innovative pedagogical interventions integrating drama, music, physical activity, robotics, puppet theater, and digital technologies have demonstrated considerable effectiveness in enhancing preschool children's emotional intelligence and socio-emotional competence. Drama-based instruction has been shown to improve emotional awareness, empathy, and expressive ability by immersing children in emotionally meaningful narratives and role-based experiences (Arias et al., 2024). Musical training programs promote emotional memory, emotional differentiation, and affective engagement, supporting both cognitive and emotional



growth (Benítez et al., 2024; Rus et al., 2024). Physical activity interventions likewise enhance emotional regulation, attention control, and positive behavior patterns by integrating movement with emotional expression and self-regulation strategies (Chang-wei, 2022).

Emerging technologies also contribute to emotional development in early childhood education. Studies on educational robotics reveal that interactive robot-assisted learning environments can significantly enhance preschoolers' emotional intelligence by facilitating emotion recognition, cooperative behavior, and emotional problem-solving (Gregoria et al., 2025). Similarly, intelligent digital support systems embedded in dance and movement curricula improve emotional engagement and self-expression through adaptive learning environments (Wang, 2024). Together, these innovations reflect a shift toward multimodal, experiential, and emotionally embedded instructional approaches that transcend traditional cognitive-centered pedagogy.

However, despite the rapid growth of emotion-focused interventions, the literature reveals a critical conceptual gap: most programs target specific emotional skills in isolation rather than embedding them within an integrated developmental framework that aligns emotional learning with cognitive, social, and behavioral growth. Without such integration, emotional interventions risk fragmentation, limited generalization, and inconsistent sustainability across educational contexts. Scholars increasingly argue that effective emotional education requires systemic alignment between classroom practices, teacher competencies, institutional policies, family engagement, and cultural norms (Muratović et al., 2022; Shih & Chang, 2023). Parental involvement and school-family cooperation have been repeatedly identified as decisive factors in sustaining children's socio-emotional development beyond the classroom, ensuring that emotional competencies are transferred and stabilized across life contexts (Muratović et al., 2022).

Furthermore, contemporary developmental research emphasizes that emotional literacy functions as a central mechanism linking emotional intelligence with creativity, learning motivation, and adaptive problem-solving. Emotionally competent children demonstrate higher creative engagement, flexible thinking, and cooperative learning behaviors, highlighting the cognitive dividends of emotional education (Sundquist & Lubart, 2022). Conversely, deficiencies in emotional development during preschool years are strongly associated with increased behavioral

disorders, emotional dysregulation, and learning difficulties in later childhood, underscoring the preventive role of early emotional intervention (Pagirienė & Ramanauskienė, 2023; Romenkova, 2024).

Educational systems worldwide increasingly recognize emotional literacy as a core curriculum domain, yet implementation remains uneven and theoretically fragmented. Cross-national analyses of preschool education reveal substantial variability in teachers' preparedness, institutional support, and curricular coherence for emotional education, often constrained by professional stress, limited training, and organizational challenges (Gu et al., 2024; Shih & Chang, 2023). Teacher emotional well-being itself emerges as a critical determinant of classroom emotional climate, with professional stress directly influencing emotional availability, instructional quality, and relational stability in preschool settings (Gu et al., 2024). These systemic pressures highlight the urgent need for conceptually robust and practically feasible emotional education models that can guide teacher training, curriculum design, and institutional policy development.

Within this complex theoretical and empirical landscape, the notion of an **integrative developmental-emotional model** emerges as a necessary advancement for emotional literacy education. Such a model conceptualizes emotional development as a continuous, staged process that integrates emotional awareness, expression, regulation, empathy, social competence, environmental conditions, and contextual moderators within a coherent instructional system. It recognizes emotional learning as both a developmental progression and a relational phenomenon, shaped by biological maturation, interpersonal interactions, pedagogical design, and socio-cultural context. Recent scholarship on emotional well-being indicators in preschool education strongly supports this systemic orientation, demonstrating that stable emotional development depends on the alignment of instructional, relational, and environmental factors (Kukushkina, 2023; Vizgina et al., 2023).

Notably, studies addressing special populations, including hearing-impaired children and autistic preschoolers, further reinforce the necessity of adaptive, developmentally informed emotional education frameworks. Research on emotional identification in hearing-impaired children integrated into general education environments demonstrates that emotional literacy development requires tailored pedagogical strategies sensitive to developmental differences (Georgieva, 2022). Similarly, investigations into

emotion recognition in autistic preschoolers highlight the importance of situational and contextualized emotional instruction for supporting inclusive emotional development (Li et al., 2023). These findings collectively underscore that emotional literacy education must be flexible, developmentally calibrated, and context-responsive.

Despite these advances, the existing literature lacks a comprehensive conceptual model that synthesizes the full range of developmental, emotional, pedagogical, relational, and contextual dimensions into an operational framework specifically designed for preschool education. Most studies focus on intervention effectiveness or isolated competencies, without offering integrative structural guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. Addressing this conceptual gap is essential for advancing both theory and practice in early childhood emotional education.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to construct a conceptually grounded, empirically informed model of emotional literacy education for preschool children that integrates developmental processes with emotional competencies and contextual conditions within a unified framework.

The aim of this study is to develop a conceptual model of emotional literacy education for preschool children based on an integrative developmental–emotional approach.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was designed as a qualitative investigation aimed at developing a comprehensive and contextually grounded conceptual model of emotional literacy education for preschool children, drawing upon an integrative developmental–emotional framework. The qualitative research paradigm was selected to allow for in-depth exploration of theoretical foundations, practitioner perspectives, and experiential knowledge in early childhood emotional education. The research setting was the city of Tehran, Iran, which was selected due to its diverse socio-cultural population and its extensive network of public and private preschool institutions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation to ensure representation of multiple professional viewpoints relevant to preschool emotional development. The participant group consisted of early childhood educators, preschool administrators, child psychologists, developmental psychologists, educational counselors, and

curriculum specialists, all of whom possessed a minimum of five years of professional experience working directly with preschool-aged children. Inclusion criteria emphasized professional expertise in child development, emotional education, or early childhood pedagogy, as well as willingness and ability to articulate reflective professional experiences. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, at which point no new conceptual insights or categories emerged from subsequent data collection.

### 2.2. Measures

Data collection was conducted using multiple complementary qualitative tools to enhance depth, credibility, and triangulation of findings. The primary method was semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which allowed participants to describe their perceptions, practices, and conceptual understandings of emotional literacy in preschool contexts while also providing sufficient flexibility for probing emergent ideas. Interview protocols were developed based on existing theoretical literature in emotional development, emotional intelligence, and early childhood education, and were refined through pilot interviews with two experts to improve clarity and conceptual focus. In addition to interviews, focused group discussions were held with selected educators to examine collective experiences and shared practices within preschool learning environments. Systematic document analysis was also employed, including review of national preschool curricula, teacher training manuals, emotional education guidelines, and child development frameworks used in Iranian early childhood education. Field notes were recorded throughout data collection to capture contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and reflective insights that enriched interpretation of interview and focus group data. All interviews and group discussions were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a rigorous qualitative analytic procedure rooted in thematic analysis with elements of grounded theory to allow the conceptual model to emerge inductively from the data. Analysis commenced concurrently with data collection, enabling iterative refinement of interview questions and analytic focus. Transcripts were first subjected to open coding, during which meaning units were identified and labeled based on

participants' expressed concepts and experiences related to emotional literacy, emotional development, instructional strategies, and child socio-emotional growth. These initial codes were then compared continuously across cases using constant comparative analysis to identify patterns of similarity and divergence. In the axial coding phase, conceptually related codes were grouped into higher-order categories that represented core dimensions of emotional literacy education, such as emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy development, social interaction skills, emotional expression, and supportive learning environments. Selective coding was subsequently applied to integrate these categories into an overarching conceptual framework that explained how emotional literacy education in preschool emerges through dynamic interaction between developmental processes, emotional competencies, educational practices, family context, and institutional support systems. Throughout the analytic process, memo writing was used to document theoretical insights and evolving interpretations. Trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through prolonged engagement, member checking with selected participants, peer debriefing among the research team, and maintaining a detailed audit trail of

analytic decisions. This analytic process ultimately resulted in the construction of a coherent and contextually grounded conceptual model of emotional literacy education tailored to preschool children within the socio-cultural context of Tehran.

### 3. Findings and Results

The qualitative findings are presented to show how the conceptual model of emotional literacy education for preschool children was derived from the data, and how core domains, mechanisms, and implementation conditions converged into an integrative developmental–emotional framework. To clarify the empirical basis of the model, Table 1 first summarizes the professional profile of the participants whose experiential knowledge and expert judgments shaped the coding process and category development. This descriptive table is provided to contextualize the subsequent thematic results and to demonstrate that the analytic claims are grounded in a multi-perspectival expert sample from Tehran's early childhood ecosystem.

**Table 1**

*Participant Profile and Professional Background*

Participant Code	Professional Role	Primary Work Setting	Years of Experience	Highest Relevant Qualification	Primary Area of Expertise
P01	Preschool Teacher	Private preschool	8	B.A. Early Childhood Education	Classroom socio-emotional practices
P02	Preschool Teacher	Public preschool	11	B.A. Education	Behavior management, peer interaction
P03	Preschool Teacher	Private preschool	6	M.A. Educational Psychology	Emotion coaching in daily routines
P04	Preschool Administrator	Private preschool	12	M.A. Educational Management	Program design, teacher supervision
P05	Preschool Administrator	Public preschool	15	B.A. Education	Institutional policy, parent relations
P06	Child Psychologist	Clinic + preschool consultation	9	Ph.D. Clinical Psychology	Emotional regulation, child counseling
P07	Developmental Psychologist	University + fieldwork	13	Ph.D. Developmental Psychology	Developmental milestones, assessment
P08	Educational Counselor	Preschool counseling unit	10	M.A. Counseling	Family guidance, emotional difficulties
P09	Curriculum Specialist	Early childhood institute	14	Ph.D. Curriculum Studies	Curriculum mapping, learning sequences
P10	Preschool Teacher	Private preschool	7	B.A. Early Childhood Education	Play-based emotional learning
P11	Preschool Teacher	Public preschool	9	B.A. Education	Group dynamics, classroom climate
P12	Child Psychologist	Clinic	11	Ph.D. Clinical Psychology	Anxiety, somatic expression of emotion
P13	Developmental Psychologist	University + consultation	8	Ph.D. Developmental Psychology	Social–emotional development

P14	Curriculum Specialist	Ministry-affiliated center	16	M.A. Curriculum Studies	Standards, program evaluation
P15	Preschool Administrator	Private preschool	9	M.A. Educational Management	Teacher training implementation
P16	Educational Counselor	Private preschool network	6	M.A. Counseling	Parent workshops, referral pathways
P17	Preschool Teacher	Private preschool	5	B.A. Education	Story-based emotional instruction
P18	Preschool Teacher	Public preschool	12	M.A. Educational Psychology	Emotional self-regulation routines
P19	Child Psychologist	Preschool consultation	7	M.A. Clinical Psychology	Screening, intervention design
P20	Curriculum Specialist	Research center	10	Ph.D. Curriculum Studies	Learning progressions, design logic
P21	Preschool Teacher	Private preschool	8	B.A. Early Childhood Education	Peer conflict mediation
P22	Preschool Administrator	Public preschool	13	M.A. Educational Management	Family engagement policy

The participant group reflected a deliberately diverse professional composition, with a strong balance between direct classroom practitioners and specialist experts who influence emotional education through assessment, counseling, supervision, and curriculum design. Experience levels ranged from five to sixteen years, supporting rich accounts of both day-to-day implementation and systemic

constraints in Tehran’s preschool contexts. This diversity was analytically important because the conceptual model required integration across developmental theory, emotional processes, and feasible pedagogy; consistent patterns that emerged across these roles were treated as robust conceptual signals rather than role-specific preferences.

**Table 2**

*Core Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Evidence Supporting the Conceptual Model*

Core Theme	Subtheme	Analytic Meaning	Illustrative Evidence (Condensed)
Emotional Awareness	Emotion vocabulary building	Expanding children’s accessible labels for internal states	Children can “name” feelings when teachers repeatedly model labels in routines
	Body–emotion connection	Linking sensations to emotions as a developmental bridge	Recognition that “tight chest” or “warm face” can signal anger/anxiety
Emotional Expression	Safe expression norms	Creating permission to express without shame	Emphasis on “allowed feelings” alongside “safe behaviors”
	Multimodal expression	Using art, play, and movement for expression beyond language	Drawing, puppets, role-play as child-friendly channels
Emotion Regulation	Co-regulation with adults	Adult scaffolding as precursor to self-regulation	Teacher proximity, calming scripts, breathing, rhythm, sensory corners
	Strategy repertoire	Teaching multiple regulation strategies	Counting, breathing, request for help, problem-solving steps
Empathy and Perspective-Taking	Recognizing others’ emotions	Reading emotional cues in peers	Attention to facial expressions, tone, situational inference
	Prosocial responding	Translating empathy into action	Comforting, sharing, collaborative repair after conflict
Social Interaction Skills	Conflict mediation routines	Structured steps for resolving peer conflict	“Stop–name–ask–choose” routines, turn-taking negotiation
	Cooperative play	Emotional literacy as a precondition for sustained cooperation	Emotion regulation predicts longer cooperative episodes
Learning Environment	Emotionally supportive climate	Classroom climate as a moderator of learning	Predictable routines reduce emotional volatility
	Adult modeling and language	Adult emotional habits as implicit curriculum	Adults’ calm naming and repair statements shape children’s norms
Family–School Alignment	Parent emotional coaching	Continuity of emotional language and practices	Parent workshops and home scripts reinforce school learning
	Culture-sensitive practice	Local norms about emotion expression	Balancing respect norms with healthy expression and boundary-setting

The thematic analysis yielded a coherent structure in which emotional literacy education was not treated as a

single skill set but as a developmental system that progresses from awareness to expression, then to regulation and

relational competencies, all within enabling environments. Across interviews and documents, participants consistently positioned emotional vocabulary and body–emotion awareness as foundational, while regulation was described as a gradual transition from adult co-regulation to child-led strategy use. Empathy and social skills emerged as downstream outcomes that depend on earlier competencies,

but also as active learning contexts in which regulation is repeatedly practiced. Environmental and family alignment themes functioned as “implementation conditions” that determine whether classroom-level instruction becomes stable behavior change, with culture-sensitive adaptation repeatedly emphasized as essential in Tehran’s heterogeneous preschool population.

**Table 3**

*Integrative Development–Emotion Pathway: Category Relationships and Proposed Developmental Progression*

Development–Emotion Level	Primary Competency Focus	Typical Learning Modalities in Preschool	Expected Observable Indicators
Level 1: Foundational (Recognition)	Emotion identification and labeling	Storytelling, picture cards, morning circle routines, emotion check-ins	Child labels basic emotions; distinguishes similar states (sad vs. disappointed)
Level 2: Representational (Meaning-Making)	Body–emotion links and situational interpretation	Guided reflection after events, puppet dialogues, teacher modeling language	Child connects feelings to causes; recognizes bodily cues
Level 3: Regulatory (Control and Repair)	Co-regulation shifting toward self-regulation	calming corners, breathing games, rhythmic movement, structured repair scripts	Child uses strategies with prompts; reduced escalation duration
Level 4: Relational (Empathy and Social Action)	Perspective-taking and prosocial behavior	cooperative play, conflict mediation routines, peer helping roles	Child notices peer distress; offers help; participates in repair
Level 5: Consolidation (Transfer)	Generalization across contexts and adults	family workshops, home–school scripts, consistent routines	Skills appear in new situations; parent reports continuity at home

The data supported a progression logic in which emotional literacy develops through staged, mutually reinforcing processes rather than through isolated lessons. Participants repeatedly described that preschool children first need repeated exposure to emotion labels in predictable routines, then require meaning-making supports that connect emotions to bodily cues and everyday triggers, after which regulation can be explicitly practiced through co-regulation and simple strategy training. Relational competencies were described as both an outcome and a feedback mechanism,

because peer interaction creates frequent emotional episodes that provide natural practice opportunities. Importantly, the consolidation level was strongly tied to alignment across adults and contexts; when home language, classroom routines, and institutional policies were consistent, participants reported more stable emotional behavior patterns and fewer regressions during stressors such as transitions, peer conflict, and performance-oriented parental expectations.

**Table 4**

*Final Conceptual Model Components: Inputs, Mechanisms, and Outcomes for Emotional Literacy Education*

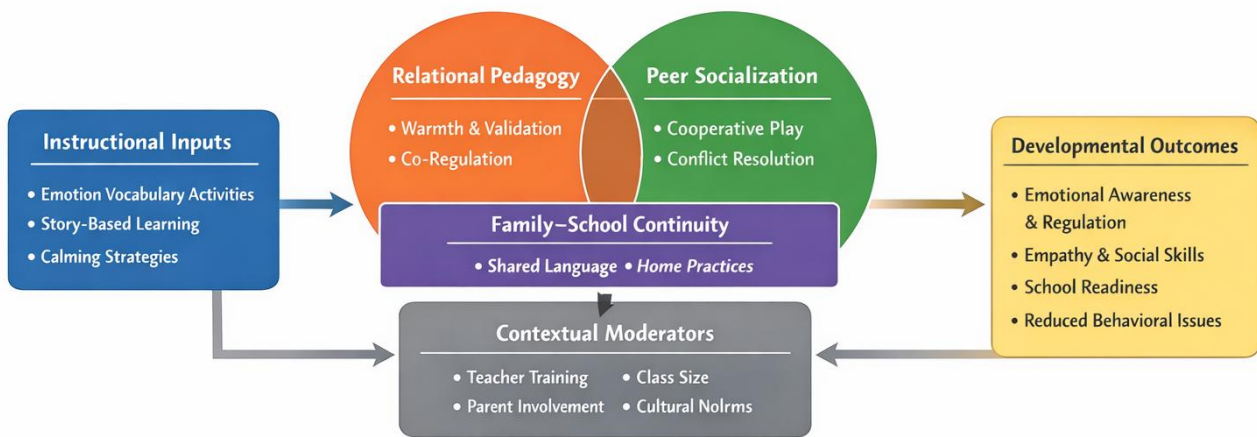
Model Component	Operational Definition in Preschool Context	Key Mechanisms Identified in Data	Anticipated Outcomes
Instructional Inputs	Planned and embedded emotional learning opportunities	routine-based teaching, story-based dialogue, play scaffolding	increased emotion vocabulary and recognition
Relational Pedagogy	Emotional learning through secure adult–child interaction	warmth, responsiveness, repair language, validation + boundaries	improved emotional safety and expression
Regulation Supports	Environmental and procedural supports for calming and repair	co-regulation, sensory tools, calming routines, repair scripts	reduced intensity/duration of dysregulation
Peer Socialization Processes	Emotional learning via peer interaction structures	cooperative play design, conflict mediation steps, prosocial roles	stronger empathy and social problem-solving
Contextual Moderators	Conditions that strengthen or weaken effectiveness	teacher training, class size, parent involvement, cultural norms	variability in uptake and stability
Family–School Continuity	Shared language and practices between home and preschool	parent workshops, home scripts, communication loops	transfer and maintenance of skills
System Outcomes	Downstream developmental impacts	cumulative skill-building across domains	better school readiness, reduced behavioral conflicts

The finalized conceptual model integrated participant accounts into a systems-oriented structure that distinguishes between inputs, mechanisms, moderators, and outcomes. Emotional literacy education was consistently framed as most effective when it is embedded in daily routines and anchored in relational pedagogy rather than delivered as discrete content. Regulation supports were treated as both instructional and environmental, because participants emphasized that children learn regulation through repeated guided practice in a physically and emotionally predictable space. Peer processes were positioned as a primary learning arena where children repeatedly test emotional meaning,

practice repair, and generalize empathy into action. Contextual moderators, including teacher skill, training access, parental expectations, and local cultural norms about emotional expression, were described as determinants of implementation fidelity and sustainability. The model therefore specifies that measurable outcomes—such as improved emotional recognition, reduced escalation episodes, enhanced peer cooperation, and stronger readiness for primary school—depend on the interaction of structured instruction with stable adult modeling and home–school continuity.

**Figure 1**

*The Integrative Development–Emotion Conceptual Model of Emotional Literacy Education in Preschool Children*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a comprehensive conceptual model of emotional literacy education for preschool children grounded in an integrative developmental–emotional framework. The qualitative findings demonstrate that emotional literacy in early childhood emerges through a structured progression of competencies including emotional awareness, emotional expression, emotion regulation, empathy, social interaction skills, and the alignment of contextual supports across educational and family environments. This integrative structure reflects a systemic understanding of emotional development that extends beyond isolated emotional skills toward a coordinated network of psychological, relational, pedagogical, and environmental processes. The results align closely with contemporary developmental research emphasizing that emotional competence constitutes a central

organizing system of early childhood learning and adaptation (Kukushkina, 2023; Romenkova, 2024).

The prominence of emotional awareness as the foundational level of the model strongly corresponds with existing evidence that preschoolers' ability to identify, label, and differentiate emotions serves as the cognitive anchor for subsequent emotional development. Prior research demonstrates that children who acquire robust emotional vocabulary and recognition abilities display significantly higher emotional regulation and social functioning (Koltcheva & Popivanov, 2025; Motsiou & Valetopoulos, 2022). The present findings further extend this literature by emphasizing the importance of linking emotional labels with bodily sensations and situational contexts, thereby strengthening emotional meaning-making and internal emotional coherence. This result is consistent with neurodevelopmental evidence showing that the decoding of facial expressions and emotion-provoking situations is

central to the development of adaptive emotional processing in early childhood (Li et al., 2023).

At the next developmental level, emotional expression emerged as a pivotal transitional competence enabling children to externalize internal emotional states safely and constructively. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of establishing classroom norms that validate emotional expression while simultaneously guiding behavioral boundaries. This balance between emotional permission and behavioral containment reflects core principles of effective emotional education reported in previous studies of emotional well-being in preschool environments (Kukushkina, 2023; Vizgina et al., 2023). Moreover, the multimodal strategies identified in the present model—including play, storytelling, art, music, and movement—are strongly supported by empirical evidence demonstrating their effectiveness in facilitating emotional communication and emotional intelligence in young children (Arias et al., 2024; Benítez et al., 2024; Rus et al., 2024).

The findings regarding emotion regulation highlight the central role of adult–child co-regulation as the primary developmental mechanism through which children gradually acquire independent self-regulation skills. This result corroborates extensive developmental literature emphasizing that emotional self-regulation is initially scaffolded by responsive adult guidance and gradually internalized by the child through repeated emotional experiences within supportive relationships (Chang et al., 2025; Yu & Ahmad, 2025). The identification of diverse regulation strategies—including breathing, sensory modulation, problem-solving scripts, and calming routines—aligns with intervention research demonstrating that structured regulation practices significantly reduce emotional dysregulation and behavioral problems in preschool populations (Bădău & Trifan, 2022; Chang-wei, 2022).

Empathy and social interaction skills emerged as both developmental outcomes and continuous learning contexts within the model. The present study's findings indicate that as children strengthen their regulation capacities, they become increasingly capable of perspective-taking, prosocial responding, and cooperative problem-solving. This reciprocal relationship between emotional regulation and social competence is well documented in the literature, which demonstrates that emotionally competent children engage more successfully in peer relationships and exhibit greater cooperative and creative engagement in learning

activities (Pagirienė & Ramanauskienė, 2023; Sundquist & Lubart, 2022). Furthermore, the structured peer interaction routines identified in the model closely mirror successful socio-emotional intervention programs that integrate cooperative play and conflict mediation as core emotional learning mechanisms (Cheng, 2023; Iuga & Turda, 2022).

A particularly significant contribution of the present study lies in the explicit integration of environmental and contextual moderators within the emotional literacy framework. The findings demonstrate that emotional learning cannot be separated from classroom climate, physical learning environments, teacher emotional styles, and institutional conditions. This conclusion is strongly supported by research showing that teachers' emotional well-being, professional stress, and emotional responsiveness directly influence children's emotional development and classroom stability (Chang et al., 2025; Gu et al., 2024). Additionally, the influence of physical classroom environments on emotional experiences identified in this study corresponds with evidence that environmental design and sensory conditions significantly affect both teacher emotions and children's emotional regulation (Guan, 2023).

The role of family–school continuity emerged as one of the most powerful stabilizing mechanisms within the conceptual model. Participants emphasized that emotional competencies developed at school are significantly strengthened or weakened depending on the consistency of emotional language, norms, and practices at home. This result aligns with prior research demonstrating that sustained socio-emotional development depends on strong cooperation between parents and educators and on the continuity of emotional instruction across home and school contexts (Muratović et al., 2022). Such alignment is particularly important in culturally diverse preschool populations, where norms regarding emotional expression may vary considerably and require sensitive pedagogical adaptation (Georgieva, 2022; Shih & Chang, 2023).

The integrative nature of the final conceptual model represents a significant advancement over fragmented emotional intervention approaches. By organizing emotional literacy into a coherent developmental sequence while embedding it within relational, pedagogical, environmental, and contextual systems, the model offers a comprehensive framework capable of guiding curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional policy. This structure is consistent with recent international trends emphasizing the systemic nature of emotional education and the necessity of

integrating emotional learning across all dimensions of preschool education (Lee & Park, 2023; Yu & Ahmad, 2025). Moreover, the model accommodates innovative instructional tools—including robotics, digital learning, music, and movement—whose effectiveness in enhancing emotional development has been empirically validated (Benítez et al., 2024; Gregoria et al., 2025; Wang, 2024).

Importantly, the conceptual model also addresses the growing concern regarding behavioral disorders and emotional difficulties in early childhood. By embedding preventive emotional education within daily learning environments, the model directly responds to documented increases in emotional dysregulation and behavioral challenges in preschool populations (Romenkova, 2024). Preventive emotional literacy education thus emerges not only as a developmental enhancement strategy but also as a protective intervention that supports long-term psychological well-being and educational success.

Collectively, the discussion of results demonstrates that emotional literacy education in preschool children is best understood as an integrative developmental system shaped by emotional competencies, relational pedagogy, environmental conditions, and contextual alignment. The present model offers a theoretically coherent and empirically grounded structure capable of advancing both scientific understanding and educational practice in early childhood emotional education.

Although the present study provides a comprehensive conceptual model, it is based on qualitative data collected within a single metropolitan context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural or institutional settings. Additionally, the model has not yet been empirically tested through longitudinal or experimental research designs, and therefore its predictive and causal validity remains to be established. The reliance on expert perspectives, while valuable for conceptual development, may also underrepresent children's direct experiential viewpoints.

Future studies should empirically evaluate the proposed model through quantitative validation, experimental intervention designs, and longitudinal tracking of children's emotional development. Cross-cultural replications would further clarify the model's adaptability across diverse educational systems and cultural contexts. Incorporating children's perspectives and direct behavioral observations may also deepen understanding of how emotional literacy unfolds in everyday preschool life.

Educational policymakers and curriculum developers are encouraged to adopt the proposed integrative model as a framework for restructuring preschool emotional education programs. Teacher training initiatives should prioritize emotional competence development alongside instructional skills, and institutional policies should support emotionally responsive learning environments. Strengthening home-school partnerships and embedding emotional literacy within daily classroom routines may substantially enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of emotional education in early childhood.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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