

THE DYNAMICS OF EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: *The article "The Dynamics of Emotional Development at Preschool Children" presents, selectively, various scientific approaches related to the concept of "emotions" in general and, specifically, during the preschool period. It reviews some contemporary debates concerning the content characteristics of emotional development dynamics and the functional nature of emotions in preschool children. Exploring scientific approaches to the concept of "emotions" in psychopedagogy, in search of its practical essence, generates a perspective that encompasses as much of the relevant field as possible and determines the basis for emotional development in children. As a result, criteria for evaluating emotions were identified and examined: perception, understanding, recognition of emotional states, and social emotions. Analyzing the issue at hand is not intended to be polemical but aims to demonstrate why it is necessary to revisit this topic, which is not actually new.*

Key words: *emotion; emotional state; emotional regulation; intellectualization of emotions; emotional state; perception of emotions; understanding emotions; recognition of emotional states.*

Introduction

Emotions, as a valuable source of information, have become a key reference point in analyzing a child's success. They are relevant and significant because they influence decision-making, boundary-setting, communication, and more. When shaping our decisions and actions, *emotions and feelings* matter equally—sometimes *even more than thoughts*. In this regard, an increasing number of researchers argue that understanding emotions greatly enhances social integration possibilities, thus ensuring the quality of a child's activities. According to D. Wechsler, an individual's adaptation to their living environment is achieved through both intellectual and non-intellectual elements, which include affective, personal, and social factors, and are essential for

success in life [Apud 14, p. 139].

Thus, the issue at hand addresses the *demands* of early education policies, especially since the process of emotional development in preschool children is forward-looking, fostering both immediate and long-term favorable growth.

In the context of new orientations in preschool education, the *development of emotions* at children complements the dimensions of preschool education from the perspective of the requirements outlined in the *Standards for Learning and Development of Children from Birth to 7 Years*. These standards specify that preschoolers should be able to perceive themselves positively as unique individuals with specific characteristics; adapt their feelings and control impulsive tendencies; recognize and appropriately express a variety of emotions; interact positively with children in their immediate environment; and demonstrate empathy, among other skills [3; 16]. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize that the preschool age represents a particularly favorable period for emotional development in children, which is reflected both in mandatory activities and in their daily experiences.

Concept and Methodology

Reviewing the main paradigms, considerations, and opinions that have entered the sphere of psychology and pedagogy (such as G. W. Allport, D. Goleman, P. J. Lang, R. Vrsti, M. Arnold, P. Popescu-Neveanu, L. S. Vygotsky, S. L. Rubinstein, etc.), various approaches to the concept of "emotion" are evident. Emotion is defined as a short-lived affective state that reflects a particular quality of the relationship with an object or situation, thus having a situational character, and can be triggered by a real or imagined circumstance. The intensity of emotions can vary greatly: it may be vague, moderate, or very intense, shaking the entire organism [5, p. 56]. In the same context, it is noted that emotion refers to a feeling and the thoughts it engenders, to psychological and biological states, and to the extent to which we are inclined to act [6].

In this line of thought, it is also important to mention that *emotion* serves as a signal indicating the need for an adaptive response, guiding the subject within their natural and social environment. On the other hand, emotion provides the individual with information about the correlation between the immediate context and the anticipated goals. Simultaneously, emotions prepare immediate responses to important stimuli and the necessary physiological support [19]. This definition leads us to observe that *emotions* facilitate optimal decision-making, favoring important decisions and accelerating the individual's decision-making process. Additionally, emotions regulate social interactions, emotional expressions, and communicate a person's internal state to others.

On the same analytical line, emotion is also defined as a fundamental affective phenomenon that develops either as a *spontaneous and primary reaction*, in the form of primary emotions or affects, or as more complex processes related to secondary motivations that reflect the true emotions. In higher values, emotions are extremely varied and differentiated. As a result, we distinguish between emotions such as joy and sadness, love and hate, admiration and contempt, sympathy and antipathy, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, etc. [12]. In this regard, W. Gerrod notes that emotions are reactions to significant events for an individual. Here, the author refers to physiological, behavioral, cognitive reactions, and subjective experiences of pleasure or displeasure [Apud 1, p. 255].

To differentiate and manage emotions correctly, people associate them in contrasting pairs, such as joy-sadness, anger-relaxation, admiration-contempt, sympathy-antipathy. This leads to the classic division of emotions into: *sthenic emotions*, which enhance activity, increase the individual's strength and energy, and *asthenic emotions*, which diminish energy and activity. This polarity results from the correspondence, or discordance, between the individual's needs, beliefs, habits, and life situations or events [7, p. 40].

From the above, it follows that emotion depends not only on the nature of the emotional agent but also, more importantly, on the *individual*, their current *physical and psychological* state, their personality, and their past experiences. Therefore, *emotion* remains essentially *individual*; it generally manifests when the subject is surprised or when the situation exceeds their capabilities. Emotion reflects maladaptation and the organism's effort to restore the temporarily lost balance [Ibidem].

C. Rubinstein also discusses emotions, highlighting specific characteristics that distinguish them from other psychological processes and mental states. According to the author, these characteristics set emotions apart from perception (which reflects the content of the object). First, *emotions represent an expression of the subject's state and their relationship with the object*. This feature differentiates emotions from perception. Second, *emotions are characterized by polarity*, meaning they have either a positive or negative sign: pleasure versus displeasure, joy versus sadness, etc. However, Rubinstein notes that this polarity is not an immutable and oppositional characteristic [28, p. 571].

In this context, it is *relevant* to note that emotions are expressed through *expressive movements*. A specific emotional state corresponds to a particular *physiological reaction*. Nonetheless, an experiment by K. Herndon demonstrates that there is no direct link between *facial expressions and the experienced emotion* (such as disgust); thus, there is no absolute universality in facial expressions when experiencing an emotion [8, p. 642–663]

This perspective supports the idea that emotional experiences *correlate* with certain external *manifestations*. According to this approach, the manifestation of emotion is due to specific changes in the activity of internal organs and the motor sphere, meaning that emotion is considered an *external expression* of a physiological reaction to a significant event [9, pp. 211–221]. At the same time, W. Cannon holds a different view, stating that emotional and physiological reactions to any stimulus occur simultaneously. According to Cannon, *emotions* originate in *subcortical areas* [2, pp. 567–586].

Based on the results of the studies presented, it is evident that emotions are an integral part of human life and fulfill several important functions, including: shaping a person's attitude towards something, directing/regulating behavior, stimulating and suppressing human activity, and more.

At the same time, observing the dynamics of research in psychology, pedagogy, and physiology, we find that the development of emotions in preschool-aged children is addressed as one of the main characteristics of the child's psychological development. In this context, researchers argue that sensitive periods for the emergence of new emotional formations occur primarily during the preschool period. Furthermore, emotional structures retain their importance and value throughout all stages of the preschool period. Thus, emotions constitute an important dimension of the child's personality, a regulator of the most crucial functions of their life. From this perspective, the preschool age represents a critical period for the development of emotions in children; a stage of essential emotional acquisitions; emotions accompany all manifestations of the child's activity, exerting a strong influence on their behavior. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on several questions, such as emotional behavior manifestations, key directions, and significant particularities of emotional development in preschool-aged children, etc. In this regard, the basic coordinates of emotions in preschool children, as discovered in the works of researchers like M. Lewis, M. Sullivan, C. Stanger, M. Weiss, S. Tomkins, C. Saarni, R. Thompson, N. Eisenberg, A. Morris, V. Pavelcu, M. Roco, A. Leontiev, L. Vygotsky, G. Kravtsov, E. Kravtsova, Yu. A. Lapteva, etc., are of interest.

Given the complexity of this issue, some researchers examine various types of *emotional perception* by children, such as *preverbal, diffuse-amorphous, diffuse-local, analytical, synthetic, and analytical-synthetic*. From this perspective, the type of perception is determined not only by the child's age, although this is the most evident factor. Differences between types of emotional perception are determined to some extent by the nature of the emotion. For example, recognizing the emotion of *fear* by a child pertains to *preverbal perception*; *emotions of joy and sadness* are characteristic of *diffuse-amorphous perception* and manifest in

children aged 4-5 years, whereas *analytical-synthetic perception* is observed at the age of 6-7 years. On the other hand, the *perception of anger is diffuse-local*, becoming dominant in children aged 4-5 years, while *analytical* perception of emotions becomes dominant in children aged 6-7 years. At the same time, emotional states in the perception process are detected in children across all age groups, particularly when recognizing emotions like anger, fear, or sadness.

Concerned with the issue of the psychological development of preschoolers in ontogeny, L. Vygotsky notes that the basic characteristics of new formations during the crisis period (late preschool age) relate to “*generalization of emotions*” or “*intellectualization of emotions.*” In this sense, the author specifies the following: most emotions are intellectually mediated; there is a natural connection between the emotional process and the process of thinking; the development of emotions occurs alongside the development of thinking; emotions participate in regulating and motivating thinking. In other words, motivational and emotional regulation of thinking takes place. Thus, emotions are a component of children’s thinking.

Regarding the dynamics of emotional development in children, research provides certain considerations. Studies converge in defining three relative components of the emotional sphere: *cognitive, affective, and reactive*. At the same time, key invariants of emotional development at preschool age retain their meaning and remain unchanged in any social situation.

Some authors’ perspectives refer to the *interaction between emotional development, general psychological development of the child, and the structures of individual psychological development* (e.g., *self-awareness, motivation, and cognitive development of the child*). In this framework, S. Tomkins highlights the need for *sequential differentiation* of emotional states and the child’s *recognition* of emotional states. Both relational and communicative efficiency depend on whether participants (children) can understand another person’s emotional state and regulate their own emotions in relation to an adult or peer. Thus, the premises for emotional regulation, in accordance with establishing the connection between feelings and representations, condition the inclusion of “words” in the emotional process, which creates the basis for verbal regulation of behavior, guiding the child’s actions towards a specific goal.

In the same vein, R. A. Thompson develops the idea that *emotional regulation* is given by *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensity and duration, through which an individual seeks to achieve their goal. From this perspective, the author also examines neurophysiological reactions in emotional regulation, such as: (a) attention processes; (b) encoding internal emotional signals; (c)

accessing “*coping*” resources; (d) regulating environmental demands; (e) choosing alternative emotional reactions, etc. The author also provides an acceptable explanation regarding the specificity and role of self-control, which, according to him, is part of emotional regulation, although regulation involves more than just inhibition (e.g., includes the ability to initiate behavior, shift attention, and plan actions). Adaptive regulation involves an optimal amount of self-control actions as well as the ability to initiate actions as needed. Therefore, regulation can be adaptive if self-control is adaptable or maladaptive, depending on the ability to voluntarily manage it.

Moreover, as the child learns to relate in the social environment, they also learn some self-control techniques, which evidently manifest in their expressive behavior and in the regulation of behavior during communication. In this sense, self-control in the development of emotions provides the child with certain forms of response, evidently determined by the social environment. From this perspective, even in the preschool period, the child begins to understand that adults may mask (negative) emotions (e.g., fear, anger), often using non-verbal techniques, such as a smile, to express opposite emotions.

Nevertheless, emotional regulation in preschool-aged children is most often achieved through the involvement of adults. With age, children accumulate experience in managing and manifesting emotions. Both management and manifestation are part of a broader process of emotional regulation, although distinctions between them are fundamental for understanding self-regulation. However, in cases where a child (or an adult) requests external intervention, the process of emotional regulation can be considered as part of external regulation as well as self-regulation.

According to other sources, the emergence of new interests and motives in children conditions their emotional development. On this basis, social emotions begin to develop intensively, thus eliminating the situational character of the emergence of emotions, making them deeper in content. As a result, the child starts to anticipate emotions in relation to a potential situation.

In light of the above reflections, other authors approach emotions through the lens of the *connection* between the *emotional framework and the cognitive framework*, with speech and psychological processes ensuring this connection. In this sense, the use of words, on the one hand, marks emotions, indicating intellectualization, awareness, and generalization of them, while, on the other hand, children use speech to manage their emotional state. It is also noteworthy that attempts by the child to regulate emotions appear already in the fourth year of life (e.g., the child makes an effort not to cry), but by late preschool age, the child actively uses words to manage emotions.

In the same area of ideas, we can also mention the findings of researchers who approach emotions in correlation with imagination, conditioning each other reciprocally. According to one author, an emotion is embodied in an image. For example, when confronted with the fear of something, a child may draw images of the consequences of threats posed by potential or real danger. In other words, an image created as a result of imagination can generate fear in the child.

In this realm of concerns, some authors' findings also address the significance of imagination at preschool age in a slightly different context. For the child, the special internal position represents the main component of imagination, making it possible to realize the structural components of imagination both in the objective environment and in the child's prior conscious experience. Furthermore, the internal supra-situational position allows the child to control their own imagination.

Therefore, preschool-aged children not only can feel but also can understand various emotional states. The levels of emotional awareness by children, understanding of other people's emotions vary: inadequate, situation-specific, verbal designation and description of expression, understanding in the form of description, and understanding in the form of interpretation and manifestation. Also, recognizing another person's emotional state is impossible without the ability to understand expressive signs of emotion.

Based on the arguments outlined above, despite their conceptual diversity, it must be noted that significant changes in indicators of *perception*, *understanding* (recognition), and *verbalization* of emotions by children occur between the ages of 4-7 years, and the age of 3-4 years can rightly be considered as preparatory, associated with the child's accumulation of emotional experience.

The examination of the child's ability to anticipate emotions, which arises in a context of new emotional formations and provides the child with the ability to anticipate the consequences of their actions and deeds, is also part of the analysis of emotional development. Thus, anticipating emotions (which emerges at the age of 4) becomes a mechanism of emotional regulation for the child, due to personal formations.

- Emergence of understanding of personal re-experiences: This correlates with affective and cognitive processes [22, pp. 5–25].
- Subordination of motives: This allows the child to overcome desires and transition to moral regulation characterized by “it is necessary” and “must” [27].
- Assimilation of prosocial behavior norms: The child learns the moral meaning of actions based on intellectual assessment of emotional attitudes towards themselves [34, pp. 127–134].
- Expansion of object content of needs and emotions: This includes the emergence of new feelings and forms of

motivational orientation in the child’s activities [29].

In summary, it is also noted that during late preschool age, significant transformations occur in social emotions, and the *anticipation of emotions* is examined as a crucial mechanism for socio-emotional development [13]. A prominent characteristic at this age is the dominance of their conduct by affective behavior, which serves as the energetic basis for the entire psychological system [11, p. 102]. Following the dynamics of research related to the specifics of emotional manifestations at preschool age, the most significant changes in the *emotional sphere* for children aged 6-7 years can be structured as follows:

- Increased capacity to understand complex emotions: such as *pride and shame*.
- Internalization and integration of these *emotions*: giving meaning to personal responsibilities.
- Increased ability to understand *emotions* experienced in specific situations.
- Tendency to judge the *emotional reactions* of others: especially adults, based on events.
- Progress in *suppressing* or *concealing* negative emotional reactions.

Regarding the evaluation of emotions in preschool-aged children, research provides certain considerations. From this perspective, some authors advocate for promoting specific criteria and indicators (Table 1) [26, pp. 84-88].

Table 1. Criteria/Indicators for Evaluating Emotions in Preschool-Aged Children

Nr.	Criteria	Indicators
1.	Perception and understanding of emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adequate orientation in perceived situations • ways of expressing emotions; • understanding and recognition of emotional states; • degree of response expression and verbal designation of emotion; • adequacy of actions in relation to emotional states
2.	Development of emotional decentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to identify oneself in relation to others.

3.	Formation of social emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the level of social mediation of emotions • the presence of prosocial motivation and the expansion of the content of basic needs • the level of situational anxiety
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The synthesis of theoretical approaches has allowed us to outline the dynamics of emotional development in preschool children and to track how children's emotions evolve from one age period to another. In this regard, each age segment is characterized by specific possibilities that determine the content and manifestation of their emotional states, as presented in the table below.

Table 2. Emotional development of preschool children

Criteria	Age				
	3-4 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	6-7 years
Development of emotional understanding	Understands the specifics of certain emotions	Understands the specifics of certain emotions	Differentiates and identifies some emotional states	Is able to show empathy	Anticipates some emotional states
Development of emotion regulation	Perceives emotional states and means of expression; primary orientation to the emotional meaning of the situation (percept	Understands and recognizes verbal expressions of 3-4 basic emotions (cognitive component)	Orients within an emotional experience, evaluates actions relative to the appropriate emotional state (reflective component)	Shows active empathy, offers assistance to peers, identifies with others (behavioral component of empathy)	Exhibits prosocial motivation, understands the moral meaning of actions ("should," "ought to"), anticipates the consequences of emotional

	ual compon ent)		nt)		actions
Developm ent of social emotions	Emotion al and cognitiv e compon ents of empathy. Expansi on of needs contents	Emotion al and cognitive compon ents of empathy. Emotion al decentrat ion. Expansio n of needs contents	Emotiona l decentrati on. Social mediation of emotional states	Social mediati on of emotion al states	Social mediation of emotional states

As a result, the criteria and indicators for evaluating emotions provide us with the opportunity to track the evolution of children's general emotional states during the preschool age. However, the indicators require operationalization, and the comprehensive emotional development of children necessitates the structuring of a psychological and pedagogical framework.

Based on the ideas presented, it should be noted that preschool-aged children are characterized by emotional variability, vividness, and impulsiveness in the expression of their emotions, which is gradually replaced by a more pronounced adaptability. All of these factors determine the key aspects of the teacher's role with children—fostering the emotional enrichment of the child's life and organizing support for understanding and regulating emotions. Thus, the development of emotions as a trait of the child's personality is an important pedagogical task. From this perspective, there is no doubt that the main factor influencing a child's emotional development is the environment. At the same time, the environment involves a way of organizing space and utilizing equipment for safety, the child's psychological well-being, and their development.

Conclusions

Summarizing the ideas presented in this paper, we can highlight the following:

- The preschool age is a period of essential emotional acquisitions, where emotions accompany the child's activities and influence their behavior.

- Emotions are a core component of the child's overall personality development, driving success in communication with peers and adults, determining the appropriateness of reactions to life events, and influencing the child's adaptation to new living conditions.
- Emotions facilitate optimal decision-making, promote important decisions, expedite the individual's decision-making process, regulate social interactions, emotional expressions, and communicate the child's internal state to others.
- The preschool institution faces a highly relevant issue that must be addressed both theoretically and methodologically.

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