

Education of emotional regulation at the preschool level according to Chilean early childhood educators

Educación de la regulación emocional en nivel inicial según educadoras de párvulos chilenas

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Fecha de recepción: 04.01.2025

Fecha de aprobación: 02.03.2025

Fecha de publicación: 06.06.2025

Cómo citar: Balocchi Nazal, A.; Palma France, C.; Huaiquini Bustos, C. & Fuentes-Vilugrón, G. (2025). Education of emotional regulation at the preschool level according to Chilean early childhood educators. *Psiquemag* 14(1), e140106.

<https://doi.org/10.18050/psiquemag.v14i1.3267>

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Abstract

Emotional regulation plays a fundamental role in children's development, and its early acquisition is crucial to establish a solid and comprehensive foundation. The objective is to unveil the approach and strategies used by early childhood educators in the education of emotional regulation at the preschool level, as well as to recognize the challenges and opportunities they face in this process. Through a qualitative approach, the aim is to deepen the experiences and perceptions, seeking to contribute to the existing knowledge in this field and to generate recommendations that contribute to strengthen the practical training in emotional education at the preschool level. Emotional education is conceived as a social construction activity that requires the active collaboration of parents and teachers, who play a fundamental role in the emotional development of children. It is concluded that the main challenges in relation to emotional regulation are due to the lack of knowledge of strategies on the part of early childhood educators regarding emotional regulation.

Keywords: Emotions; educational strategies; early childhood education, Preschool teacher, Emotional Development.

Resumen

La regulación emocional desempeña un papel fundamental en el desarrollo de los niños, y su adquisición temprana es crucial para establecer bases sólidas integrales. El objetivo develar el enfoque y las estrategias utilizadas por las educadoras de párvulos en la educación de la regulación emocional en el nivel preescolar, así como reconocer los desafíos y oportunidades que enfrentan en este proceso. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, se pretende profundizar en las experiencias y percepciones, buscando aportar al conocimiento existente en este campo y generar recomendaciones que contribuyan a fortalecer la formación práctica en educación emocional en el nivel preescolar. La educación emocional es concebida como una actividad de construcción social que requiere la colaboración activa de padres y docentes, quienes desempeñan un papel fundamental en el desarrollo emocional de los niños. Se concluye que, los principales desafíos en relación con la regulación emocional se deben al desconocimiento de estrategias por parte de las educadoras de párvulos en cuanto a la regulación emocional.

Palabras clave: Emociones; estrategias educativas; educación de la primera infancia, Docente de preescolar, Desarrollo emocional.

INTRODUCTION

It has already been recognized that emotional regulation (ER) is one of the most important components of psychological and mental well-being (Fuentes-Vilugrón *et al.*, 2025). In this regard, ER has been considered as a process that allows managing and controlling emotions effectively, demonstrating that this competence contributes to the well-being and adaptation of children and young people, being of vital importance in educational success and in life in general (Miño-Díaz *et al.*, 2025). For Gross (1999), ER refers to those processes by which people exert an influence on the emotions we have, on when we have them, and on how we experience and express them. That is, it gives us the ability to modify the intensity, duration and expression of our emotions, which is essential for psychological and social well-being, especially in early childhood (Alamos *et al.*, 2022; Korucu *et al.*, 2022).

In the current educational context, emotional regulation in the preschool stage has emerged as a determining factor for the comprehensive development of boys and girls (Núñez, 2024). The lack of emotional regulation skills can lead to emotional dysregulation, understood by Rodríguez Quiroga & Pelaz Antolín (2013) as a constant and interfering complication that can become particularly challenging when facing emotions perceived as highly intense in response to common stressors encountered in daily life. This scenario can not only hinder the management of emotions, but also generate additional complications in maintaining an adequate emotional balance, manifesting itself in various ways: biological aspects (substance abuse, self-harm, hypertension, increased heart rate, cancer, eating disorders, among others); psychological and cognitive aspects (anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, among others); and social aspects (attention deficit, aggressiveness, lack of empathy, problems of coexistence, among others) (Fuentes-Vilugrón *et al.*, 2024).

In this context, teachers are one of the main responsible for contributing to the development and emotional well-being of children and young people. However, teaching has become a demanding vocation characterized by constant

emotional fluctuations, often causing an increase in stress levels and/or emotional exhaustion (Fuentes-Vilugrón *et al.*, 2024; Greenier *et al.*, 2021). This highlights the need to train prepared individuals with sufficient competencies to provide support to students in instances of emotional dysregulation (Fuentes-Vilugrón *et al.*, 2022). For this, when faced with situations of emotional overflow or dysregulation of students, teachers have the task of remaining calm, adjusting their language level and communicating clearly, precisely, concisely, without long speeches; with a calm voice, an attitude that conveys serenity (nonverbal communication) (Byun & Jeon, 2023; Ureña *et al.*, 2024), since, otherwise, there is a risk that the intervention may aggravate the facts or consequences for children, adolescents and youth (NNAJ, from their Spanish initials) and for their immediate environment (Ministry of Education, 2022).

As Olhaberry and Sieverson (2022) confirm, social-emotional development and emotional regulation are central achievements during early childhood, occurring in a relational context and contributing to the achievement of healthy attachments, social integration, school achievement and later mental health. In this regard, the absence of ER can lead children to experience confusion about what they are perceiving. Emotional regulation and expression at this stage depends largely on the interactions they establish with other people (Blair *et al.*, 2015; Gómez-Rivera & Acosta-Silva, 2021). Physical contact, conversations and reassurance from adults and caregivers allow children to remain calm in necessary situations and acquire knowledge of how to regulate their emotions (Armus *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, Gross and Thompson in (2006) argue that emotions can be regulated at any stage, before, during or after their appearance regardless of the factor that triggered them, whether of individual or social origin. Thus, depending on the strategy used, the individual can modify the internal or external factor that is influencing him and causing the emotion. Similarly, Gómez and Calleja (2016) propose a classification of emotional regulation from a propositional perspective (directed towards action), where the individual, consciously, can regulate his/her emotions using strategies.

In summary, there is a need to deepen with respect to the various strategies intended by early childhood educators to strengthen the

expression of emotions in the teaching-learning process of preschool children, mentioning some methodologies that complement the work already done by these professionals in the field of early childhood education. Thus, the strategies are aimed at addressing the current challenges related to the expression and impact of emotions on learning, given that emotional skills are essential for the well-being and academic and social success of children. Therefore, we seek to sensitize both early childhood educators and management teams to the importance of implementing specific and intentional strategies that can significantly improve the educational experience of learners. Because, the idea of enriching and consolidating these competencies with a progressive and collaborative approach can provide continuous and consistent support in order to prepare children to face emotional and social challenges throughout their lives. In this context, behaviors linked to emotions may sometimes seem inappropriate, given that children are in a process of acquiring values and principles essential for living together. Based on this background, the objective of the research was to unveil the approach and strategies used by early childhood educators in the education of emotional regulation at the preschool level, as well as to recognize the challenges and opportunities they face in this process.

METHOD

The methodology of this study is based on the interpretative hermeneutic paradigm, which does not seek to generalize from the results obtained. The research focuses on the elaboration of a detailed description of the object of study, with the objective of understanding the behavior of the people studied through the interpretation of the meanings they attribute to their own behavior and that of others (Mansilla & Huaiquián, 2020). The approach of this study is qualitative, which implies that it is based on a deep and detailed understanding of the events studied (Mujica-Johnson, 2024), which is determined by the deepening and understanding of emotional education at the preschool level.

Participants

The study included as inclusion criteria those early childhood educators who were active members of the school's teaching staff. As for the exclusion criteria, educators who were not part of the school were excluded, as well as those who were not directly linked to its educational activities. For this reason, the participants were selected from a specific group where the techniques and instruments will be applied under a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique based on availability and accessibility. The study participants consisted of 12 Preschool teachers (Table 1).

Table 1
Description of the participants

Profession	Gender	Level	Age of the students
Preschool teacher	Female	Medium Minor	2-3 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Kinder	5-6 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Medium Minor	2-3 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Kinder	5-6 years
Preschool teacher	Female	All levels (English)	2-6 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Pre-Kinder	4-5 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Pre-Kinder	4-5 years

Preschool teacher	Female	All levels (language and communication)	2-6 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Director of Early Childhood Studies	2-6 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Medium Major	3-4 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Pre-Kinder	4-5 years
Preschool teacher	Female	Medium Major	3-4 years

Instruments

The research techniques and instruments were determined according to the research objective. The verbal method that allowed us to collect information was the interview, which is defined as “the interpersonal communication established between the researcher and the subject of study for a certain purpose. It is a relationship that

aims to obtain verbal answers to the questions posed about the proposed problem” (Martínez, 2011 p. 28). This technique was implemented through individualized interviews with each early childhood educator; the aforementioned interview is composed of 15 questions (Table 2), in a semi-structured interview, having the ability to obtain more detailed and varied information than in a structured interview.

Table 2

Guiding questions regarding emotional education at the early childhood level

N °	Pregunta
1	How would you define emotional regulation in the context of early childhood education?
2	What do you think are the main challenges for preschoolers in terms of emotional regulation?
3	What strategies or methods do you use to help children identify and manage their emotions?
4	How do you integrate the teaching of emotional regulation skills into your daily classroom routine?
5	What role do you think adults, parents and educators play in the development of emotional regulation in children?
6	How do you handle intense emotions or moments of emotional conflict in the classroom?
7	What resources or materials do you find most useful for teaching children about emotions and emotional regulation?
8	What strategies do you employ to foster an emotionally safe and supportive classroom environment?
9	How do you work in partnership with parents to support children's emotional regulation beyond the school environment?
10	What indicators or signs do you observe to assess a child's progress in terms of emotional regulation?
11	How do you adapt your approaches to emotional regulation for different ages or individual needs of children?

12	What personal challenges have you faced in teaching emotional regulation and how have you overcome them?
13	How to integrate the teaching of social skills with emotional regulation in your educational activities?
14	What strategies do you use to help children understand the connection among their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors?
15	What advice would you give to other early childhood educators on how to improve the teaching of emotional regulation?

Plan of analysis

This research was based on the Grounded Theory where content analysis was used through open, axial and selective coding, widely used in qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 2002; Palacios, 2021). This procedure was developed through the qualitative analysis software Atlas. Ti, and involves the coding of data to achieve a detailed description, excluding irrelevant data and seeking to deepen the understanding of the analyzed material. The consolidation between coding and categorization manages to determine categories that share some characteristics, and allow us to perform an analysis (De la Espriella & Gómez, 2020). For the development of the analysis, the process consisted of several phases: (a) Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with various early childhood educators; (b) Transcriptions of the interviews were made, categorizing the answers according to the number of questions asked; (c) The answers were analyzed and common elements were detected in terms of generating propositions and main topics associated with each conjunction of questions; (d) Repeated ideas acquired from the answers provided by the educators were consolidated; e) The main concepts were organized based on the answers provided by the educators, creating general categories and subcategories for each question asked; and f) The elaborated schemes were analyzed, obtaining varied results in relation to the question asked, which were validated by the diverse answers provided by the educators interviewed.

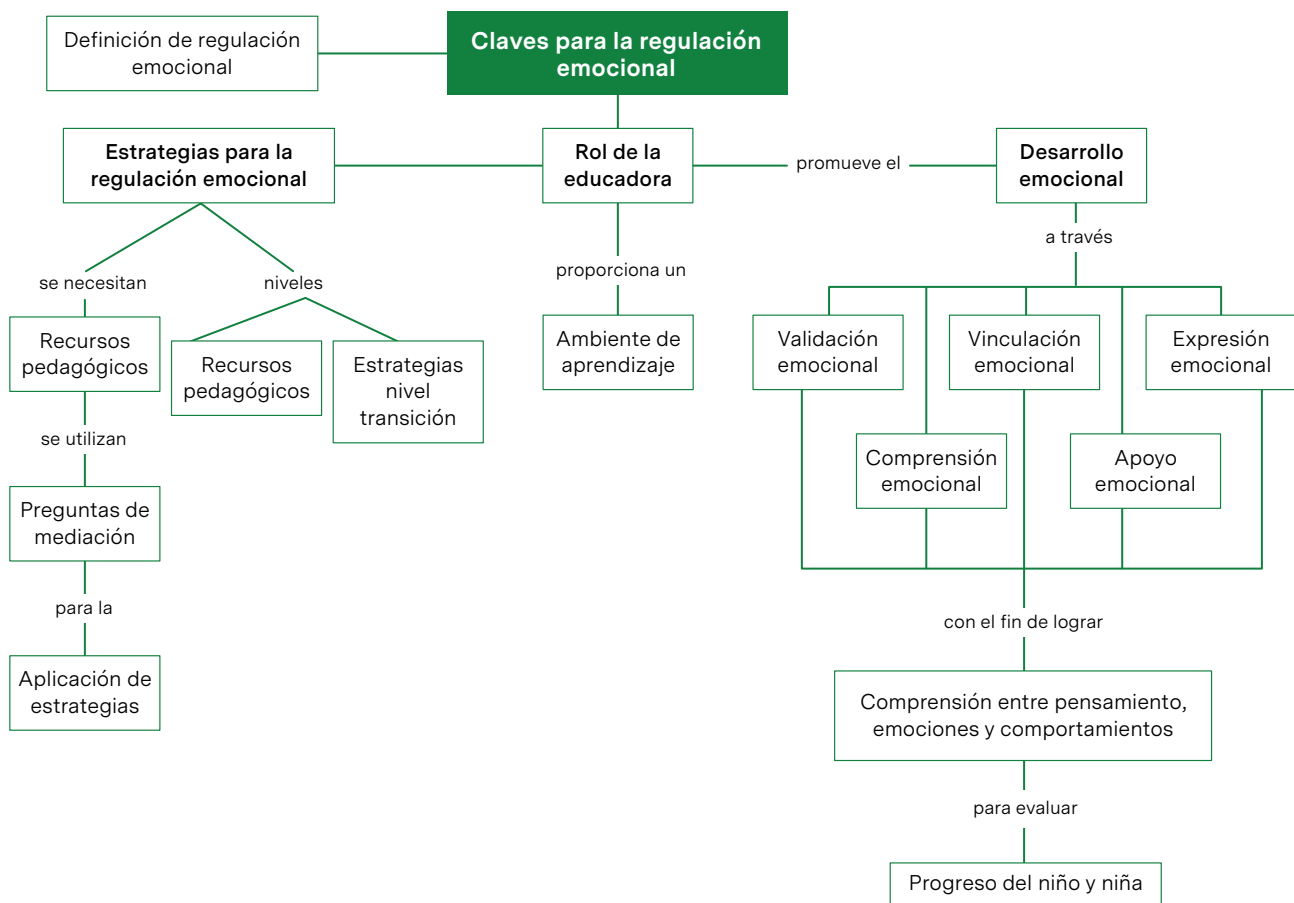
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the analysis of the data, a total of 35 codes were identified that generated 460 citations, distributed in three main categories: the first one: “Keys to emotional regulation”, covers strategies and tools that facilitate the development of self-regulation skills in children. The second: “Challenges in the face of emotional dysregulation”, covers the difficulties and barriers faced by educators and children when faced with episodes of emotional dysregulation. Finally, the third category: “Collaborative work for emotional regulation”, highlights the importance of cooperation between educators and families in the promotion of emotional regulation in learning contexts.

Category N°1: “Keys to emotional regulation”

The first category, Keys to Emotional Regulation, highlights the fundamental elements for fostering this competence in children. The definition of emotional regulation constitutes an essential foundation. In this sense, as mentioned by Logatt (2016), emotions are fundamental to learning and remembering, as they are primarily responsible for the consolidation of learning acquired throughout life. From there, strategies for emotional regulation are developed, including the use of pedagogical resources such as mediation questions, as well as specific strategies for different levels of development, which facilitates their application in each context. This environment allows children to understand and regulate their emotions, establishing a connection among their thoughts, emotions and behaviors, with the objective of achieving observable progress in each of them. Together, these elements contribute to an effective emotional regulation that boosts children’s personal and social development, favoring their integral wellbeing in the educational context (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Keys to emotional regulation



A central factor in this process is the role of the educator, who provides an adequate learning environment and promotes the emotional development of children, supporting them through validation, understanding, bonding, support and emotional expression. As suggested by Cordero (2011), the teacher should select and employ pedagogical strategies that promote meaningful learning, not only in the academic setting, but also in the resolution of everyday problems. This reinforces the idea that learning should be relevant and applicable for the student, thus facilitating the internalization of knowledge and skills. This is demonstrated when the early childhood educators state the following regarding emotional regulation strategies:

“There is always a way to reach that person or that child. You have to identify how to reach him or her independent of the age of the context. Always have a strategy to be able to help that child” (E2, P11).

Likewise, when approaching emotional regulation from the process model, Gross and Thompson (2007) suggest that emotional regulation strategies vary according to the moment in which they intervene in the temporal sequence of emotion. Added to this is the idea that no regulation strategy is intrinsically good or bad, which indicates that the context and flexibility in the use of these strategies are crucial for their effectiveness. This approach is aligned with the teaching of skills such as empathy, good treatment, understanding of consequences, self-regulation and the ability to cope with frustration, all of which are essential for adaptation and child well-being (Gómez & Calleja, 2016; Navarro et al., 2021). Within the aforementioned strategies those that are used in the first instance in the face of emotional dysregulation are:

“First, teach them to identify their emotions and give them simple or easy strategies so that they can gradually learn to return to calm” (E7, P1) “I look for affection, I first try to accompany the feeling they are having,

because usually, it is not about the child not crying or getting angry and it is not about limiting the feeling they are having, but to be able to channel it, to allow them to feel it, to live it and also to learn to express it in the best way” (E9, P3).

Within the framework of the strategies, some resources are used as a support in search of emotional regulation, taking into account the needs and characteristics of each child, such as:

“Concrete resource, it seems to me that everything that can mean images, stories, situations that can, in essence, even be taken from everyday life, I think are the most relevant” (E9, P7) “using puppets, perhaps doing a dramatization in this case the colored monsters, or in other words, everything that is visually striking for children is super significant” (E4, P7).

The educator plays a fundamental role acting as a mediator between the child and his or her own emotions, helping first to recognize them and then to manage and regulate them. This is evidenced when the educators mention that:

“When children are sad, the educator must have strategies that allow her to approach them with empathy, tenderness, affection, which, of course, will always be achieved as long as we also have a close bond with the children” (E9, P1); “always showing support, accompanying, and making them feel safe, always the most important thing is that we are here to help, that, if the parents are not here, we are the people who will be there to take care of them, to help them” (E10, P6).

Thus, the role of the early childhood educator in teaching emotional regulation highlights the importance of adults themselves developing the ability to recognize, regulate and express their emotions. Romo (2019) emphasizes that by acting as role models educators facilitate emotional learning in children, who, through imitation, adopt emotional attitudes and practices that they observe in their environment. Altogether, these elements underline the importance of a comprehensive emotional education, in which children learn essential skills for their future life in a safe and structured environment. In this regard, the role of the educator is to provide a warm and emotionally comfortable environment:

“An environment that is safe for children is an environment of trust, where they feel they can talk about what they feel, where they feel welcome to express what they feel, and where there are adults, as they said, sensitive, so I feel sorry, yes, I feel angry, to the history of each child as well” (E9, P8) “to provide a safe environment, of respect, where they feel they have the capacity to be able, perhaps, to deregulate, but also to have the feeling that they will be able to be calmed, I think it is an environment of respect, calm, safety” (E12, P8).

Within the learning environment there should be duties and rules of coexistence that allow for environment of respect and emotional responsibility.

“It is to promote different values among the children themselves, such as respect, raising hands, being careful, being loving; that is another thing that also promotes a suitable environment for children and another thing that I would also leave as an important point is to always prepare an emotional briefcase, an emotional corner, a corner of calm, it is fundamental, I wish it was like that in all classrooms” (E1, P8).

In the area of interpersonal relationships, the educators emphasized the importance of promoting empathy and respect among children, as well as modeling behaviors that facilitate the development of healthy bonds. These processes are especially relevant in the first years of life, as they facilitate the development of emotional skills. Moreover, they do not occur in isolation, but rather within the framework of shared social interactions between the children and their caregivers (Stolorow & Atwood, 2014). According to Salguero et al. (2011), emotions provide valuable information about people’s internal state, including their thoughts and intentions. Understanding both our own emotions and those of others facilitates communication and interpersonal relationships, allowing us to develop more effective social competencies. Therefore, it is of great relevance that children maintain interpersonal relationships, understand the different personalities found in the classroom and outside it, which is why educators mention that:

“In teamwork it is essential for them to know that there are different people, different characteristics, different ways of being, so that they can also work on empathy, and based on that they can manage to get along with other people, with other classmates, with other ... adults” (E11, P13) “these soft social skills, as they are called, can be practiced in a certain way in role-playing games, in corners, so that they can understand and in an innate way, accompany, perhaps the partner who is sad or happy” (E12, P13).

The results of this study indicate that pre-school educators in private schools in Temuco use different strategies of emotional regulation that contribute to the comprehensive emotional development of children at the early childhood level. The observation and accounts of the educators reflect a perspective of emotional validation, which is fundamental when interacting with children. This implies recognizing and accepting their emotions without judging or minimizing them, creating an environment where they feel understood and supported (Neuro-Class, 2024). Every emotion is valid, within the emotional development and the teaching of emotional skills it is important to recognize the validation of emotions and apply it in the day to day, all emotions play an important role and all must be validated. This is why:

‘It is important that children feel validated, valued and contained by the adult in the classroom, who is the most significant person for them’ (E4, p. 6). ‘Accompanying the feelings, they are experiencing is important, because usually it is about preventing children from crying or getting angry. It is not about limiting their feelings, but rather channelling them, allowing them to feel and live them, and also teaching them to express them in the best way possible’ (E9, p. 3).

There are several indicators that are related to effective emotional regulation, and noticeable progress in the emotional context, among which the educators recognize:

“...that he doesn’t start crying, that he burst into tears in the face of a situation that causes him frustration, that he can reason in his little head and realize that what happened is not so terrible as to burst into tears, but that it is a situation in which he may feel sad or

frustrated, but that he can try again and maybe then he can resolve it successfully” (E5, P10) “instead of regulating it like several times a day, it was once, and then it happened to be like once, twice, or three times a week, and so it has been going down. I think that when one sees that the overflows decrease is when one is able to see that one is progressing, then, as those are like the parameters” (E7, P10).

Furthermore, the early childhood educators interviewed highlighted the importance of fostering emotional understanding in children by helping them identify and name their emotions in specific situations. This strategy allows children, from an early age, to begin acquiring an emotional vocabulary that enables them to express their feelings. This is consistent with studies suggesting that early emotional understanding facilitates the capacity for emotional expression and regulation (Saarni, 2011). This is evident when the educators mention that:

“It is very important to get the children to recognize them and make them part of their daily life, for example, what’s wrong, I’m angry, how do I feel my emotion, I feel like screaming” (E4, P10). “Role-playing, perhaps, so that they can put themselves in the other’s place, if they are sad, if they are happy and maybe they can ask, or give them a hug, or accompany them or lend them a toy” (E12, P13).

Some of the strategies applied in the pedagogical work regarding emotional education are:

“The board of emotions: when the child arrives in the morning, he takes his picture and leaves it; in the morning we talk about how he arrived from home, how he feels, if he is sad or if he arrived happy, and that is done as a first instance in the morning” (E4, P8) “There are fights or things like that, I stop, that is, I don’t continue with the class, as if nothing happened. If I see that something has happened in the playground, we talk about it, we all talk together, we try to come to a conclusion, we do some calming exercises and then we continue with the class.” (E7, P8).

The findings of this study indicate that early childhood educators employ a variety of strategies to promote progress in emotional regulation in preschool children. One of the

central strategies is the creation of emotionally safe learning environments, where children feel valued and can express their emotions. In relation to the role of the educator and the environments she fosters in her classroom in favor of emotional education, it is worth mentioning the emotional management within the classroom, where it is mentioned that:

“to help the child also to develop tools and strategies that allow him/her to identify, ah, it bothers me when the friend takes my pencil, that bothers me, and then, when the educators begin to describe the situations to the children, then the children begin to understand which are the situations that may bother me and what I can do when faced with that situation” (E9, P10) “the most important thing is to contain the children, the first thing is to contain them, obviously there are some children who are very sensitive, and the first thing is to contain them, to be able to hug them, and there are children who cannot be hugged with a hug, so the first thing is to contain them and wait for them to calm down and return to calm” (E4, P6).

On the other hand, it is relevant to point out the developing connection between thoughts, emotions and, consequently, actions. In this regard, the educators state that:

“Young children are just beginning to know and from that base they begin to understand and try to regulate their emotions” (E12, P14) “it can also be something more abstract that is difficult for children to understand or reflect on their own thoughts; emotions are a little easier, because it is something they experience more fully; on the other hand, thoughts, I think they go by more unnoticed” (E7, P14).

When reflecting on emotional development, there is a relationship with the emotional evolution of the teacher, who must strive for self-regulation in order to intervene in emotional dysregulation. The educators comment on emotional development that:

“When entering the classroom, I always leave everything outside; from the door inwards the concern is them, and we, with our emotions, have to breathe, forget, overcome, because the priority at that moment is them” (E8, P12)

“a stage where they explore their emotions freely and are on the way to regulate them” (E3, P1).

There are different reflections regarding the definition of emotional regulation, which are based on diverse knowledge and personal experiences. In this regard, the educators state that:

“I would define it mainly as recognition of emotions and self-regulation, mainly in children” (E2, P1) “the process that children go through or, yes, because they are really children, to control or manage their emotions within the classroom, within different contexts, also adapting to the fact that there are many children in their environment. It is like that, to control themselves, to know themselves, to respect themselves” (E8, P1).

In this sense, emotional education is conceived as a social construction activity that requires the active collaboration of parents and teachers, who play a fundamental role in the emotional development of children (Benavidez & Flores, 2019; García, 2012). This process fosters in children the development of social, communicative, motor and emotional skills that contribute to meaningful and autonomous learning, which can be applied in various life situations.

Emotional expression was also encouraged by the educators, who encouraged the children to express their emotions freely, through various activities that emphasize both verbal and concrete emotions. This approach allows children to experience and externalize their emotions in a safe and constructive way, avoiding emotional repression, which has been shown to have negative effects on children’s emotional development (Gross, 2015). By encouraging emotional expression, educators are promoting a form of self-regulation that, in the words of Gross and John (2003), facilitates the process of integration and management of intense emotions in childhood. Likewise, the educators mentioned that they use emotional regulation strategies before emotional dysregulation occurs, highlighting the importance of the mediating adult’s emotional self-regulation. The lack of skills in this area, as pointed out by Rodríguez Quiroga & Pelaz Antolín (2013), can lead to emotional dysregulation, which is defined as a persistent and interfering complication that can

be particularly challenging when facing emotions perceived as intense in the face of common daily life stressors. This scenario not only makes it difficult to manage emotions, but can also create additional obstacles for maintaining an adequate emotional balance.

Within the academic context, there are several ways to enhance the expression of emotions, using different strategies and even resources that allow children to learn about emotions in a playful and effective way. The educators state that some of these strategies and resources are:

“The board of emotions, when the children arrive in the morning and take their picture and leave it in the morning; we talk and also work on how they arrived from home, how they feel, if they are sad, if they arrived happy, why they arrived happy and that is done as a first instance in the morning” (E4, P8) “take them out of the room so they can be alone, so they can calm down and can also tell what is happening to them” (E2, P6).

Within the search for emotional regulation, there is a key factor related to the bond between the educator and the infant. In terms of emotional support, the educators demonstrated a proactive approach, providing contention and support in moments of emotional conflict, especially in situations that generate frustration or sadness. This emotional support not only allows children to feel secure and confident, but also strengthens the emotional bond with their educators, which is crucial for their emotional development (Thompson, 2020). Regarding this emotional bonding the educators state that:

“I think it will depend on the bond that one has and achieves with that child, the skills that the child and the adult also have to be able to approach that situation as such” (E9, P6). “The way in which we are going to approach each situation will be different depending on the bond, depending on the skills the children have and the possibility we have to accompany them” (E9, P6).

Another factor that undoubtedly influences when facing emotional dysregulation are the mediating questions used in the conciliation with the infant. This is evidenced when the educators say that:

“When the child is already calm, look for the solution: what happened, why did it happen, how can I help you, what do you need, etc.” (E4, P6) “How do you think he/she will feel, if? or what did you think when, or what did you think that ... he/she wanted to be when...?” (E9, P14)” It is super important to get the child to name them, recognize them and make them part of their day, for example, what’s wrong with you, I’m angry, how do I feel my emotion, I feel like screaming” (E4, P10).

Among the different strategies mentioned by the educators, they specify some referring to the transition levels, which in some cases are very different from those applied at other levels:

“Always showing support, accompanying, and making them feel safe, the most important thing is that we are always here to help, that if the parents are not here, we are the people who will be there to look after them, to help them” (E10, P6). “To kindergarten children who, maybe they don’t get so upset, maybe you can approach them and talk and ask them what happened, how did they feel, what happened” (E9, P11).

Within the framework of the strategies, there are different actions to be developed in the search for emotional regulation, specifically for middle levels. Some of the strategies mentioned by the educators are:

“When they do not yet have the development of language, but always from the description, from putting themselves in the other’s place, from the experiences, from reflecting on what happened in a situation” (E9, P14) “the topic has to be much more limited, perhaps review a few emotions, because suddenly one sees the six in a row and it is a lot, then, be limited, work on a few emotions and for them to internalize the topic as well” (E7, P11).

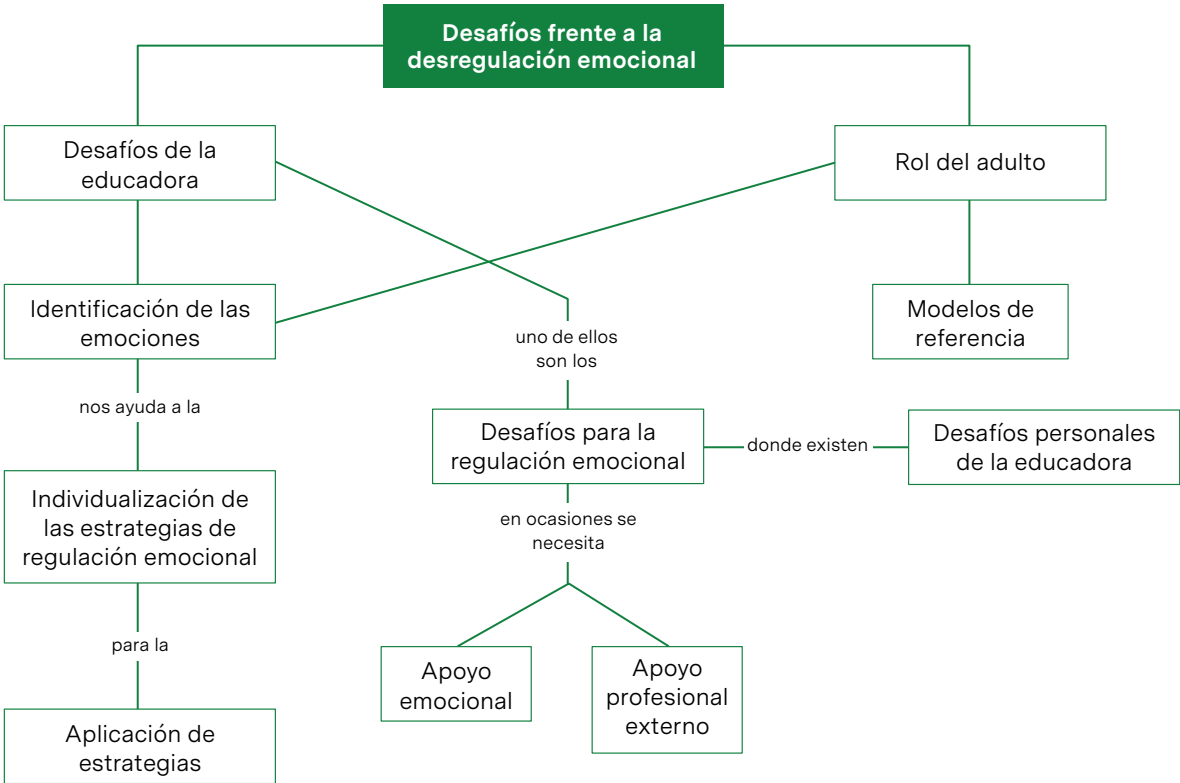
Indeed, there is not a single tool that is effective for all situations. Success lies in the diversity of approaches and the ability to adapt to the particular needs of the classroom. To promote an emotionally healthy environment, it is necessary that the teaching staff and the educational community assume a constant and

active commitment to the implementation of appropriate tools (Cayambe-Gordillo *et al.* 2024). Thus, the choice of the most appropriate tools will be determined by the educational context, students' needs and creativity. The educators pointed out that these environments allow a space of trust where children can practice emotional management by facing and managing different emotions, a key aspect in their development. According to Cayambe-Gordillo *et al.* (2024) the teacher's emotional management is essential to establish a positive and productive learning environment, since, by adequately managing their own emotions, they can generate an environment of trust and security that allows students to feel comfortable to express their emotions and learn.

Category N°2 “Challenges facing emotional dysregulation”.

The second category, Challenges facing emotional dysregulation, presents the fundamental aspects that educators face when dealing with emotional dysregulation in the educational setting. One of the main challenges for the educator consists of identifying the children's emotions, since this skill allows the individualization of emotional regulation strategies and facilitates their effective application. Likewise, the adult plays an essential role as a reference model for children, influencing their emotional development. In addition, there are various obstacles to achieving adequate emotional regulation, such as the personal challenges that the educator faces in her work of regulating children's behavior, which, on occasions, may require the intervention of external professionals to strengthen her response capacity (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Challenges facing emotional dysregulation



There are many challenges to emotional regulation. Within this context there are also many factors that hinder emotional regulation and the way in which the educator faces emotional dysregulation. These challenges become evident when educators mention that:

“The main challenges are given by those which have to adapt to a world where there is no prioritization of children’s needs” (E9, P2) “The biggest challenge I have faced during these years is with children with special educational needs” (E3, P12).

One of the main challenges facing emotional dysregulation is to get the children to identify the emotion they are feeling at that moment, which is why educators affirm that the way to collaborate in the identification of emotions is:

“First, teach them to identify their emotions and give them simple or easy strategies so that they can gradually learn to return to calm” (E7, P1). “It is essential that children know what their emotions are and how they can work with them and make them available for the different situations and learning experiences in which they are confronted in the classroom” (E1, P1).

It is of utmost importance to have safe environments where the infant feels comfortable. The educator must provide a comfortable environment so that when faced with emotional dysregulation, the infant finds emotional support to identify and understand his or her emotion. This is why the educators affirm that:

“A safe environment will always be one where there are adults who are really committed and concerned about how the children are” (E9, P8) “We have the task of being there as guides and also, as I was saying, to intervene in the development of these skills so that they can have, I don’t know, their emotional regulation, knowledge of their emotions, identification” (E11, P5).

There are different factors that educators recognize as challenges for adults in the context of emotional regulation. One of the main challenges they face is the recognition of emotions. This is observed when they state that:

“I think that one of the main challenges is the issue of recognizing emotions because ... I think that is what is costing the most nowadays and once you recognize that, you move on to the process of emotional regulation” (E2, P2) “learning to know their emotions. Many times, they are angry, happy, overwhelmed, but they do not know what emotion they are feeling, and that leads them to not know how to act, they just get angry, yell or hit you” (E12, P2).

Within the challenges of emotional regulation, there are personal challenges and experiences for each educator. These challenges focus mainly on the educator’s self-regulation and their own emotional management. Regarding this, the educators state that:

“One also feels overwhelmed, one often feels exhausted when, as I said, if there is a child who is unregulated more than once a day, it is very tiring, so I think that is the most difficult thing, how to overcome that moment of frustration, because, obviously, you don’t get it out with the children, but you feel that way inside” (E7, P12) “the first challenges began when I tried to understand that I also had to learn to regulate myself based on how I felt about things that happened with the children” (E9, P12).

The educator must be a person emotionally capable of supporting the infant in the face of emotional dysregulation, empathizing with their emotions and contributing to their emotional regulation. Regarding emotional support, the educators mention some important aspects such as:

“That they say what it was that led them to, finally, support them without them knowing, I don’t know, if they don’t know how to identify their emotion, you are going to calm them down with something” (E8, P3) “the role of us would be like containing them, talking to them, telling them this happens, this is why you are feeling this way” (E6, P5).

It is important for the educator to individualize the strategies to be used, taking into consideration the particular characteristics and needs of each child. This is why the educators say that:

“We always have to see the characteristics of their needs, what the group is like, what each one is like, what attracts their attention, and based on that we can work” (E11, P11) “one has to learn how to know the children, study them, get to know them, the same as I said before, get to know the parents to see what each one needs” (E12, P11).

When the educator, for various reasons, does not feel capable of dealing with emotional dysregulation, it is necessary to seek support. This support must be professional and must work in collaboration with the educational team. In this regard, the educators mention that:

“We are giving them tips, we are giving them strategies or suddenly we look for external support, which has also happened in previous years; psychologists have come to support them or to give them talks about emotional regulation and how to look for strategies at home” (E4, P9). “If they give you the interview, see the possibility of having an external specialist, to see what is happening, what is bothering him, if there is something that they know is bothering him so as not to do it in the room, to avoid stressors” (E7, P9).

It is necessary for the educator to show herself as a reference model to the infants; it is important to manage one’s own emotions adequately in order to be a reference in front of them: Regarding this, the educators state that:

“A role model for the children; the way we feel and control our emotions is how they will do it too” (E3, P5) “since they are born, the

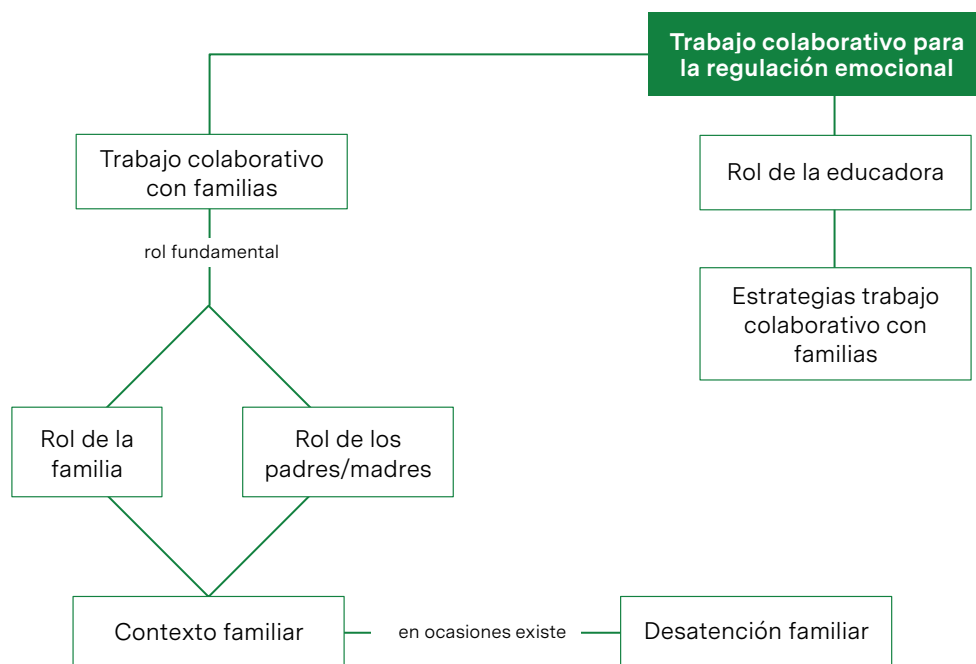
only way for them to be able to regulate their emotions is that we also learn to regulate our own emotions; we as mediators; so, if we are not able to regulate our own emotions it is very difficult in this case for my child to be able to regulate them” (E4, P9).

It is essential that the educators responsible for carrying out this task are people who are prepared, who have the competencies and sufficient training to deal with the support of students in crisis situations. That is, they must know how to remain calm, adjust their language level and communicate clearly, precisely, concisely, without long speeches; with a calm voice, an attitude that conveys serenity (non-verbal communication), since, otherwise, there is a risk that the intervention may aggravate the events or consequences for children, adolescents and young people and their immediate environment (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Category N°3 “Collaborative work for emotional regulation”

The third category, Collaborative work for emotional regulation, highlights the importance of collaboration between the educator and the families to support children’s emotional development. In this sense, the role of the families as well as that of the parents is fundamental, since the family context directly influences emotional regulation, and family neglect is a factor that can hinder this process, highlighting the need for active participation of the families. Likewise, the educator plays an essential role in applying collaborative strategies with families to create a supportive environment that favors children’s emotional regulation (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Collaborative work for emotional regulation



Collaborative work with families was identified as an effective strategy to promote continuity in the teaching of emotional regulation. Educators mentioned that working together with parents facilitates the understanding and reinforcement of emotional management strategies at home, extending the benefits of emotional education beyond the classroom. According to Razeto (2016), “the family is defined as a fundamental learning space, a community of love and solidarity that is irreplaceable for the transmission of cultural, ethical, social and spiritual values, which are essential for the development and well-being of both its members and society in general” (p. 3). On the other hand, Franco et al. (2022) point out that both the family and the school are two key actors in the human formation of individuals, since both environments offer interactions that allow children and adolescents to acquire knowledge and live meaningful experiences. This is fundamental to obtain a successful result in terms of emotional regulation. Regarding collaborative work with the family, the educators affirm that:

“When there is work with the family and besides here with the school there is support, it is seen that the child no longer cries, he/she talks” (E2, P10). “We act in a triad with the children, which means that we act with the family, with the children and with the educa-

tional institution, so in this triad it is important to know the family as a protagonist in the development and learning of children, especially in emotional development” (E1, P5).

The aforementioned evidences that educators recognize the role of parents as a fundamental element in the development of children’s emotional regulation, pointing out that, when parents are involved and collaborate in the educational process, children experience a more significant progress in their emotional regulation. This parental support fosters coherence between the school environment and the home, as the children receive their first experiences of emotional regulation and mentalization, especially through the relationship with the mother, who plays a key role in helping the children to interpret and make sense of emotional interactions, reflecting on their internal world (Fonagy and Target, 1997). Parents are key figures in the development of their children, since they act as fundamental models in the children’s lives. The absence of adequate parental involvement can have negative consequences on the overall development of the child (Torío et al., 2009).

This strategy reflects the importance of the adult as a support figure in the self-regulation of emotions in childhood, as suggested by the emotional

regulation model proposed by Cassidy (2008), in which the adult acts as an external regulator for the children until they are able to manage their emotions autonomously. Therefore, the role played by the family in emotional regulation should be one of teaching and accompaniment, facing emotional dysregulation using appropriate and effective strategies. This is evidenced by the following statements:

“I think that more than anything else, maybe we should talk to them, we should talk to them about emotions, maybe how they feel every day, because there is a lack of vocabulary of emotional range, because they are always angry, sad, happy, and there are no other emotions” (E6, P5). “The family are finally like the models and examples that the children see, so that they know how to regulate if they are the first ones who should, in theory, teach the children how to do it” (E7, P5).

Another aspect to consider is the active communication between the educational team and the family. This favors in several aspects the learning of emotions and, after that, the emotional regulation. This is one of the strategies that educators should consider. This is why they mention that:

“Outside the school environment, what we do, for example, we talk about it a lot and we do workshops in the parents’ meetings on how parents can reinforce the topic of emotional regulation at home” (E4, P9) “reading a special story, we send some special material so that they can bring it back, for example, on Monday and share it with their classmates, to be able to do a workshop that they can come to the school to tell something, a special story” (E11, P9).

There is an important responsibility in the role of parents that talks about being a fundamental pillar in the lives of children, which implies an active participation in the emotional sphere. The educators affirm that:

“Parents are like your safe place and if parents are not able to identify or help you control your emotions, it is difficult for someone else to do it” (E2, P5). “It is the same for parenting issues, as in the homes there is little talk, or at the family level, of emotional regulation, of how we can do it, many times parents, not

with bad intentions, but they tend to calm tantrums with a phone, with a Tablet, so obviously, they are not a good guide” (E7, P2).

When the family does not effectively fulfill its role with regard to the infant’s emotions, there is an inadequate management of these emotions, which could lead to emotional dysregulation and, in effect, to emotional overflow. This is evidenced when the educators mention that:

“Nowadays technology is making, I think, such a big call on the attention of adults that many times children are not having the necessary support at home, and that makes that, in addition, children are much less accompanied by adults to help them and teach them these emotional development skills” (E9, P2) “The main challenges are that they have to adapt to a world in which there is no prioritization of children’s needs, of attention, of parents’ attention, the need for presence. This lack of presence of adults in children’s lives generates those children in early education are obviously challenged to arrive at educational environments with very few or low emotional skills” (E9, P2).

The family context has a considerable influence on the infant’s emotions, which is why it is important to ensure that it is a comfortable environment where the children feel comfortable and their emotions are validated. In this regard, the educators say that:

“It is important to highlight with the family how necessary it is to focus on how we express emotions, how we relate to others, how I feel and how they are role models for the children as well” (E9, P9) “Many times they are parents who seem to be from another generation, from another time, who were not as contained as children are today” (E11, P9).

The school, as a space for learning and training, cannot disassociate itself from the educational processes that take place within families. Its challenge lies in recognizing and recovering these processes, not only to integrate them with theoretical and practical knowledge in the classroom, but also to generate other types of pedagogical interaction that connect with family life and favor contextual, relational and

meaningful learning (Rodríguez, 2018). Both the family and the school have the responsibility to recognize each other as spaces of ethical, political and moral co-responsibility in education. As stated by Fuentes *et al.* (2022), it is considered of vital importance to recognize the family and the school as agents that build and accompany the development of children.

CONCLUSIONS

From the results obtained and the contributions of the research, it can be concluded that the main challenges in relation to emotional regulation are due to the lack of knowledge of strategies on the part of early childhood educators regarding emotional regulation. In addition, it is crucial that both educators and adults in general act as role models throughout early childhood. This implies creating emotionally safe environments, identifying situations that may affect children and applying appropriate strategies according to the individual characteristics of each child.

Teachers, as role models, must learn to manage their own emotions in order to effectively deal with emotional dysregulation and address it appropriately. In addition, it is essential to encourage the development of emotional skills in children, promoting empathy through everyday actions or games. Using situations experienced by the children themselves to explain emotions contributes to the construction of a solid and meaningful emotional base. That is to say, every action that the teacher performs can have a profound impact on the infants, since they are in a stage of integral development, in which the emotional aspect has a decisive influence on the other aspects of growth. Therefore, the role of the educator is essential, since the strategies used must be adjusted to the emotional needs of each child, favoring his or her well-being and emotional development in a positive way.

Acknowledgments:

The authors would like to thank the participants for their support

Funding:

Self-financed

Authors Roles:

ABN: Conceptualization, drafting of the manuscript, methodology, formal analysis and interpretation of results, and review.

CBF: Conceptualization, drafting of the manuscript, methodology, formal analysis and interpretation of the results, and revision.

CHB: Conceptualization, drafting of the manuscript, methodology, formal analysis and interpretation of the results, and revision.

GFV: Conceptualization, drafting of the manuscript, methodology, formal analysis and interpretation of the results, and revision.

Competing interests: The authors declare under oath that they have no conflict of interest in the preparation of this article.

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