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SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN LATIN AMERICAN SCHOOL CONTEXTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

Socio-emotional competencies have gained increasing importance in education due to their contribution to the holistic development, learning, and well-being of children and adolescents. In the Latin American context, marked by social, cultural, and technological transformations, it is essential to identify current trends in programs aimed at strengthening these competencies. The objective of this study was to analyze trends in socio-emotional competency development programs in Latin America through a systematic literature review based on the PRISMA protocol. A total of 30 studies published between 2021 and 2026 were retrieved from Scielo, Latindex, Dialnet, and Google Scholar. The findings reveal a predominance of intervention studies using quasi-experimental and descriptive designs, mainly conducted in primary and secondary educational settings. The programs focused on developing emotional intelligence, self-esteem, empathy, resilience, social skills, responsible decision-making, and emotional self-regulation. Positive outcomes were reported in educational inclusion, academic performance, school coexistence, and the reduction of aggressive behaviors. However, several limitations were identified, including weak curricular integration, limited family and community involvement, insufficient teacher training, and the lack of long-term evaluation processes. The study concludes that socio-emotional competency programs are effective strategies for promoting students' holistic development. Nevertheless, their sustainability requires stronger institutional support and coordinated efforts among schools, families, communities, and government agencies.

Keywords: socio-emotional competencies, emotional education, educational programs, social and emotional learning, Latin America, school context.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary educational contexts, socio-emotional competencies have gained increasing importance as an essential component of students' holistic development, contributing not only to the strengthening of cognitive abilities but also to psychological well-being, social coexistence, and adaptation to dynamic environments. This approach responds to a paradigmatic transformation in education, which has moved beyond an exclusive focus on the cognitive dimension to integrate emotional, social, and ethical dimensions into teaching and learning processes. All of this seeks to promote the psychological well-being of students as well as that of the educational agents who are part of educational institutions.

In Latin America, this perspective is particularly relevant because of structural issues such as social inequality, school violence, and mental health challenges that especially affect children and adolescents, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, various international organizations have emphasized the importance of strengthening socio-emotional skills as part of human development, noting that these competencies can improve coexistence, academic performance, and the construction of life projects (UNESCO, 2020; Vázquez Martos, 2020). Along the same lines, several Latin American countries have advanced curricular standards, national policies, educational plans, or official programs. Colombia and Chile have explicit national legislation, while Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, among others, have pursued curricular integration without specific legislation.

Socio-emotional competencies comprise a set of interrelated skills that include self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, empathy, responsible decision-making, and social skills. These dimensions directly influence how students face everyday situations, interact with others, and manage their emotions across different contexts (López-Coronel et al., 2024; Ramírez Rocha, 2025). From this perspective, developing these competencies has become a priority within education systems, particularly in school settings.

In response to this need, recent years have seen an increase in the implementation of educational programs aimed at strengthening socio-emotional competencies across different educational levels. Empirical evidence shows that these programs generate positive effects on various dimensions related to holistic development. For example, significant improvements have been reported in students' emotional intelligence and adaptive capacity (Hidalgo-Jara et al., 2025), as well as increases in self-esteem (Rubilar et al., 2023) and resilience (Mamani et

al., 2025). Favorable effects have also been observed in reducing aggressive behaviors and strengthening school coexistence (Villarreal & Malaver, 2023; Pernía & Gil, 2021).

Similarly, other studies highlight that socio-emotional interventions lead to improvements in specific skills such as assertiveness (Resendiz-Canales et al., 2023) and empathy (Rincón & González, 2023), demonstrating their impact on interpersonal development. Recent studies have also shown that these programs can positively influence students' academic performance and social adjustment, reinforcing their role as a comprehensive educational strategy (Brolrzovich Zuloeta, 2026; Redondo et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, despite the positive results identified in this literature review, the implementation of these programs presents significant challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of systematic integration of socio-emotional competencies into the curriculum, which limits the continuity and sustainability of interventions. In many cases, the incorporation of these programs depends on isolated initiatives by teachers or institutions, resulting in inequalities in their implementation (Ferreira et al., 2023; Sotomayor Soloaga & Leiva Largo, 2023).

There is also a shortage of longitudinal studies capable of analyzing the long-term impact of these interventions, as well as limited research at specific educational levels, such as higher education (López-Bustamante & Vargas-D'Uniam, 2025). This situation highlights the need to strengthen research in the field and move toward more structured and sustainable implementation models.

Another relevant aspect in the literature is recognition of the multidimensional and contextual nature of socio-emotional development. Various studies indicate that this process does not occur in isolation but is influenced by multiple factors, including family, school, and social environments. Accordingly, there is a need to adopt an ecosystem approach involving different educational stakeholders, such as teachers, families, and the community (Rojas de Comeca et al., 2024; Hidalgo-Jara et al., 2025).

Taken together, the evidence analyzed shows growing interest in implementing socio-emotional competency programs in Latin America, characterized by a trend toward educational intervention studies with consistently positive results. However, limitations are also identified regarding the lack of institutionalization and the need to consolidate these efforts within structured educational policies.

Within this framework, this article aims to analyze, through a systematic review based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, trends in the implementation of socio-emotional competency programs in Latin American school contexts, identifying the methodologies employed and the effects recognized on the well-being of the educational community.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Approach and Design

This research adopts a qualitative documentary approach through a systematic literature review aimed at identifying, analyzing, and interpreting trends in the implementation of socio-emotional competency programs in Latin American school contexts.

The methodological design was based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, ensuring a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process across the identification, selection, eligibility, and inclusion stages of the studies analyzed. This approach is appropriate because it enables not only the collection of empirical evidence but also its critical integration, consistent with the interpretive analysis developed in the Results and Discussion sections.

2.2 Search Strategy and Information Sources

The literature search was conducted in academic databases recognized for their coverage of scientific production in Latin America: SciELO, Dialnet, and Latindex. These sources were selected for their thematic relevance, access to Spanish-language literature, and importance in the field of education.

Controlled descriptors and keywords related to the object of study were used, including "socio-emotional competencies," "emotional education," "social and emotional learning," and "educational programs." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were also used to broaden and refine the results, enabling the identification of empirical studies specifically related to program implementation in school contexts.

In addition, a manual search of repositories and Google Scholar was conducted for theoretical saturation purposes, facilitating the identification of relevant studies not indexed in the main databases, in accordance with PRISMA methodological recommendations.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, the following criteria were established:

Inclusion criteria

- Articles published between 2021 and 2026, in order to analyze recent evidence in a post-pandemic context.

- Empirical studies involving the implementation, evaluation, or analysis of socio-emotional programs.
- Studies conducted in formal school settings (early childhood, primary, lower secondary, or upper secondary education).
- Publications in Spanish or relevant to the Latin American context.

Exclusion criteria

- Exclusively theoretical studies without empirical support.
- Studies that did not address socio-emotional competencies as a central focus or relevant variable.
- Studies conducted outside formal educational settings.
- Duplicate documents or documents without full-text access.

2.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews, ensuring transparency and traceability at each stage. The procedure comprised the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases.

During the identification phase, a systematic search was conducted in the SciELO and Dialnet databases using combinations of descriptors related to socio-emotional competencies, emotional education, social and emotional learning, and educational programs. This search initially retrieved 92 potentially relevant records.

Subsequently, during the screening phase, the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the identified documents were reviewed, excluding those unrelated to the object of study or failing to meet the previously established criteria. Duplicate records and records without full-text access were also removed. As a result, 18 studies from the main databases were selected: SciELO (n = 10) and Dialnet (n = 8).

To broaden the scope of the review and reduce the risk of omitting relevant evidence, a complementary manual search was conducted in Latindex and Google Scholar. This strategy identified 12 additional studies directly related to the implementation and evaluation of socio-emotional competency programs in educational contexts, nine from Latindex and three from Google Scholar.

Finally, during the eligibility phase, the preselected texts were read in full and rigorously assessed according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria established for the review. This

procedure yielded a final sample of 30 articles, which constitute the documentary corpus analyzed and the empirical basis of this systematic review. Figure 1 presents the flow diagram of the study selection process according to the PRISMA methodology.

2.5 Data Analysis Strategy

Type of program or intervention

- Methodological approach
- Study population
- Población objeto de estudio
- Socio-emotional competencies addressed
- Associated variables
- Main findings

The analysis was conducted through thematic coding and comparative categorization aimed at identifying recurring patterns, convergences, and divergences among the studies. This procedure made it possible to establish the main trends in the field as well as research gaps, in line with the results and discussion presented below.

2.6 Methodological Considerations and Scope of the Study

It is important to note that although the systematic review identified consistent trends in the development of socio-emotional programs in Latin America, the study presents limitations inherent to this type of design. These include the heterogeneity of the methodological approaches used in the studies analyzed and the absence of standardized indicators, which hinder direct comparison of results.

Likewise, the concentration of research at certain educational levels and the predominance of short-term designs condition the scope of the findings. Nevertheless, these limitations are themselves part of the object of analysis, as they make it possible to identify relevant gaps in the field and guide future lines of research.

3. Results

The analysis of the 30 studies included in this systematic review identifies a set of consistent trends regarding the types of programs implemented, the socio-emotional competencies addressed, the methodological approaches employed, and the populations targeted by the

interventions. Relevant gaps also emerge that define the current state of the field in Latin America.

Table 1
Distribution of Reviewed Studies by Research Category (n = 30)

Category	n	%
Direct intervention programs	14	47
Related programs	6	20
Correlational studies	6	20
Other (theoretical/reviews)	4	13
Total	30	100

Note. The table presents the distribution of the 30 studies included in the systematic review on socio-emotional competency programs in Latin America. Direct intervention programs were the predominant category (47%), followed by related programs and correlational studies (20% each). Theoretical studies and reviews represented 13% of the sample.

Regarding the types of studies analyzed, there was a clear predominance of direct intervention programs (47%), specifically aimed at strengthening socio-emotional competencies through structured pedagogical strategies. This category includes the studies by Aguilera and Bolgeri Escorza (2021), López-Coronel et al. (2024), Redondo et al. (2024), Rodríguez Esquivel and Castillo-Gualda (2023), Trujillo Guzmán et al. (2024), Reséndiz-Canales et al. (2023), Rubilar et al. (2023), Hidalgo-Jara et al. (2025), Mamani Quispe et al. (2025), and Villarreal and Malaver (2023), whose findings show significant improvements in variables such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, school coexistence, resilience, educational inclusion, and academic performance.

Related programs (20%) correspond to studies in which socio-emotional competencies formed part of broader educational objectives. This group includes studies by Ferreira et al.

(2023), Rojas de Comeca et al. (2024), Suriel and Escalante Jiménez (2024), Madera Romero et al. (2024), Castellanos (2023), and UNESCO (2020), which link socio-emotional development to pedagogical practice, leadership, teaching strategies, educational innovation, and the development of life skills.

Correlational studies (20%) explored associations between socio-emotional competencies and educational or psychosocial variables. Studies by Bravo-Andrade et al. (2021), Calzada Alfaro and Patiño Domínguez (2022), Díaz Alba and Copete (2025), Jolay-Benites et al. (2023), Rojo Guillamón (2023), and Jiménez Muñoz et al. (2025) consistently report positive relationships between socio-emotional development and variables such as school adjustment, psychological well-being, coexistence, educational inclusion, and positive adolescent development.

Finally, theoretical studies and reviews (13%) were represented by works such as Cabello Sanz et al. (2024), Gutiérrez Becerra (2025), Jorge Sánchez et al. (2024), and Ramírez-Rocha (2025), which provide conceptual frameworks for understanding the role of socio-emotional competencies in areas such as inclusion, a culture of peace, school sports, and coexistence.

Regarding the competencies addressed, the results reveal a multidimensional approach. Emotional intelligence was one of the most frequently studied variables, with positive effects observed among adolescents and students at different educational levels (Hidalgo-Jara et al., 2025; Rodríguez Esquivel and Castillo-Gualda, 2023; Calzada Alfaro and Patiño Domínguez, 2022). Self-esteem was likewise a recurring dimension, with significant improvements following the implementation of specific programs (Aguilera and Bolgeri Escorza, 2021; Rubilar et al., 2023). Resilience also emerged as a relevant competency for coping with situations of vulnerability and supporting academic performance (Mamani Quispe et al., 2025; Villarreal and Malaver, 2023).

Similarly, several studies reported progress in empathy, social skills, peaceful coexistence, and emotional self-regulation (Gutiérrez et al., 2023; Rincón and González, 2023; Trujillo Guzmán et al., 2024). These findings support an understanding of socio-emotional competencies as a complex construct integrating intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions oriented toward students' holistic development.

From a methodological perspective, quantitative approaches predominated, particularly quasi-experimental designs with pretest and posttest measurements used to evaluate intervention effectiveness (Aguilera and Bolgeri Escorza, 2021; Rubilar et al., 2023; López-Coronel et al., 2024; Redondo et al., 2024). However, some studies incorporated mixed and qualitative methodologies that made it possible to understand teachers' and students' perceptions of the educational processes (Ferreira et al., 2023; Sotomayor Soloaga and Leiva Largo, 2023). Despite this methodological diversity, the review revealed a shortage of longitudinal research capable of establishing whether program effects persist over time.

Regarding participants, there was a notable concentration of research involving primary and secondary education students. This finding is consistent with growing concern about strengthening socio-emotional competencies during adolescence, a stage considered critical for identity construction, emotional regulation, and social coexistence (Bravo-Andrade et al., 2021; Rodríguez Esquivel and Castillo-Gualda, 2023). Relevant experiences were also identified in primary education (Figueroa Nava and Serrano Barquín, 2023; Gutiérrez et al., 2023; López-Coronel et al., 2024), although early childhood education remained underrepresented.

Another relevant aspect is the limited inclusion of teachers and school leaders as intervention populations. Only a few studies analyzed teachers' socio-emotional competencies or their influence on pedagogical practice and educational leadership (Ferreira et al., 2023; Rincón and González, 2023; Suriel and Escalante Jiménez, 2024; Rojas de Comeca et al., 2024). This reveals a perspective that remains largely student-centered, with less attention paid to other actors within the educational ecosystem.

Overall, the reviewed studies agree that socio-emotional competency programs have positive effects on student well-being, school coexistence, educational inclusion, the prevention of aggressive behaviors, and academic performance (Aguilera and Bolgeri Escorza, 2021; Rubilar et al., 2023; Villarreal and Malaver, 2023; Díaz Alba and Copete, 2025; Mamani Quispe et al., 2025). However, significant challenges were also identified regarding limited curricular institutionalization, weak coordination among family, school, and community, insufficient teacher training, and the absence of follow-up processes for assessing the sustainability of achieved outcomes (Ferreira et al., 2023; Rojas de Comeca et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2020).

In summary, the evidence analyzed depicts an expanding research field characterized by substantial empirical production on the effectiveness of socio-emotional interventions, although significant challenges remain in terms of theoretical consolidation, institutional sustainability, and ecosystemic coordination of educational actions.

4. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review suggest that the field of social and emotional learning in Latin America is undergoing empirical consolidation and applied expansion, characterized by the prevalence of studies aimed at validating program effectiveness in school contexts. Analysis of the 30 included articles reveals a clear trend toward educational interventions using quasi-experimental designs, reflecting sustained interest in demonstrating, through quantifiable evidence, the impact of socio-emotional competencies on key psychoeducational variables.

First, almost half of the corpus (47%) consists of direct intervention programs, indicating that the field has advanced further in its applied dimension than in the construction of theoretical

frameworks or explanatory models. This pragmatic orientation aligns with the need of Latin American education systems to implement concrete solutions to problems such as school violence, dropout, and deteriorating emotional well-being. However, this same trend poses a structural limitation: insufficient coordination between practice and institutionalization, evident in the implementation of isolated and contextually restricted programs without continuity through sustained public policies.

From a methodological perspective, the predominance of pretest-posttest designs reveals concern with measuring immediate changes in variables such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and behavior. However, comparative analysis of the studies identifies a scientific gap in terms of temporality, since most studies do not include longitudinal follow-up capable of assessing the persistence of observed effects. This limitation is critical because socio-emotional development is inherently an evolutionary process requiring medium- and long-term assessment.

Regarding the variables addressed, the results show remarkable consistency in the positive effects of interventions. Studies such as Hidalgo-Jara et al. (2025), Rubilar et al. (2023), and Mamani et al. (2025) converge in reporting significant improvements in emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and resilience. Likewise, research such as Villarreal and Malaver (2023) demonstrates reductions in aggressive behaviors, suggesting that socio-emotional competencies affect not only individual well-being but also collective classroom dynamics.

This pattern of results suggests that socio-emotional competencies operate as cross-cutting variables with substantial explanatory power, capable of simultaneously influencing affective, behavioral, and academic dimensions. Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals that in several studies these competencies appear as secondary or mediating variables, particularly in programs focused on academic performance or leadership. This indicates that the field remains in a transitional phase in which the socio-emotional dimension oscillates between being an educational end in itself and a means of achieving other educational outcomes.

A relevant aspect of the analysis is the distribution of the population studied, with a clear predominance of research conducted in secondary education. This trend can be interpreted from two perspectives. On the one hand, it reflects recognition of adolescence as a crucial stage for socio-emotional competency development; on the other, it highlights reduced attention to earlier developmental stages, particularly early childhood education, where empirical evidence remains limited. However, in this systematic review, this result is also explained by the selection criteria adopted, since priority was given to studies and programs targeting primary and secondary school students.

Similarly, teachers are underrepresented as subjects of intervention despite their central role as mediators of social and emotional learning. Although some studies (Rincón & González, 2023; Suriel & Escalante, 2024) address this dimension, their presence in the corpus is limited.

This situation creates an important tension: while programs seek to transform students' behavior and skills, the socio-emotional competencies of those facilitating the educational process are not always strengthened, potentially compromising the sustainability and depth of interventions.

Another key finding is the emergence, albeit still incipient, of an ecosystem approach in some studies, particularly those involving families and communities (Hidalgo-Jara et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2020). This approach recognizes that socio-emotional development extends beyond the classroom and takes shape across multiple spaces of socialization. However, the overall analysis shows that most programs remain centered on the student as the unit of intervention, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Regarding thematic lines, four major trends were identified:

1. Direct development of socio-emotional competencies
2. Impact assessment on psychoeducational variables
3. Correlational studies
4. Design of pedagogical proposals

The coexistence of these lines reflects an expanding but still fragmented field. While some studies are moving toward teaching innovation and curricular integration, others remain at descriptive or correlational levels without being translated into applied proposals.

Finally, a cross-cutting element across the 30 studies analyzed is the identification of a gap between evidence and educational policy. Despite the consistency of positive results, the incorporation of socio-emotional competencies into official curricula remains partial and uneven across the region. This suggests that the challenge lies not only in demonstrating program effectiveness but also in translating that evidence into public policy decisions that ensure sustainability and reach.

In summary, the integrated analysis of the corpus suggests that social and emotional learning in Latin America demonstrates strong empirical support, contextual relevance, and transformative potential, but faces structural challenges related to institutionalization, teacher training, and longitudinal research. Overcoming these limitations will require a shift in approach: from isolated interventions toward systemic, coordinated, and sustainable educational models.

5. Conclusions

This systematic review provided a comprehensive analysis of trends in the implementation of socio-emotional competency programs in Latin American school contexts, highlighting

educational institutions' growing interest in promoting the development of these competencies among their students.

First, the findings confirm that socio-emotional competency development programs are highly effective in strengthening students' individual and social well-being, with significant impacts on dimensions such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, resilience, empathy, and emotional regulation, among others. These results reaffirm the cross-cutting nature of these competencies and their direct influence on the quality of school coexistence and learning processes.

Second, a clear predominance of intervention studies using quasi-experimental designs was identified, demonstrating consolidation of the field in terms of educational program evaluation. Nevertheless, this empirical strength contrasts with the limited presence of longitudinal studies, restricting understanding of the sustained impact of interventions over time and posing an important challenge for future research.

The analysis also reveals that the implementation of socio-emotional programs continues to follow a largely fragmented logic dependent on isolated institutional initiatives, limiting scalability and sustainability. In this regard, one of the most significant findings is the gap between available scientific evidence and its institutionalization in educational policy, preventing these programs from becoming structural components of school curricula across the region.

Regarding the study population, there was a high concentration of research involving secondary and primary education students, reflecting recognition of these stages as key periods for socio-emotional development. However, this trend coexists with important gaps, particularly in early childhood education and in the socio-emotional training of teachers and school leaders, who are fundamental actors in the effective and sustainable implementation of these programs.

Moreover, although a multidimensional understanding of the socio-emotional construct is evident, a conceptual tension is also identified in how it is addressed. In some studies, these competencies are treated as educational ends in themselves, whereas in others they are subordinated to instrumental outcomes such as academic performance or school discipline. This duality highlights the need to advance toward more integrated theoretical frameworks to guide implementation.

Similarly, although ecosystem-oriented approaches are emerging, these experiences remain incipient and have not yet become the dominant model. Limited coordination among school, family, and community continues to be a structural weakness that reduces the reach of socio-emotional development as a comprehensive process.

In summary, the results of this review indicate that socio-emotional competencies constitute a strategic axis for transforming education systems in Latin America, not only because of their

impact on students' holistic development but also because of their potential to contribute to more inclusive, equitable, and healthy school environments.

Nevertheless, their consolidation requires overcoming a set of structural challenges, including:

- the need for systematic curricular integration,
- the strengthening of sustained public education policies,
- the incorporation of longitudinal research approaches,
- and the adoption of ecosystem models involving all educational stakeholders.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to move from a fragmented, program-based implementation logic toward a comprehensive and sustained educational model in which social and emotional learning is recognized not as a complement, but as an essential component of the right to quality education in Latin America.

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