# Specific Elements of Education for Emotional Development in the Curriculum Documents of the Discipline Personal Development in Primary Education

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## Abstract

*The purpose of the research is to identify the specific elements of emotional development activities at the level of curricular documents in the education systems of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. A comparative analysis of school programs and auxiliaries for the discipline of Personal Development was carried out. The criteria that formed the basis of the content analysis were based on the dimensions of emotional development: recognition of emotions, behavioral and cognitive self-regulation of emotions, interpersonal relationships and interpersonal sensitivity. The research data showed that in the Personal Development auxiliary from the Republic of Moldova, themes related to the recognition of emotions predominate, while in the Personal Development auxiliary from Romania there are more themes related to the behavioral and cognitive self-regulation of emotions.*

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## 1. Introduction

Over time, education about emotions has been revised in various ways, but it has always focused on the social development of students as part of their human development. It has been considered both inside and outside the educational curriculum, depending on the justification of study plans and programs. Émile Durkheim (1980) mentioned that education is the action undertaken by adult generations on those who are not yet mature for social life; by loving society, individuals love themselves, and education transforms them into true human beings. Dorothy Cohen (2012) believed that school should encourage and help understand the world of children by fully utilizing their senses, feelings, and intellect, with emotion being an organized mode of human existence. Emotional behavior is seen as an organized system of means that lead to a purpose; it is the unfolding upon the self (Sartre, 2010) as a comprehensive part of the person. Goleman (2005) demonstrated that emotional intelligence is twice as important as IQ and technical skills. The characteristics of a leader with high levels of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills.

Emotional education is a response to social needs that is insufficiently addressed in academic programs; emotional competences are understood as the set of knowledge, capacities, skills, and attitudes necessary to adequately lead the awareness, understanding, and regulation of emotional phenomena. The objective is to achieve social well-being in interaction with personal well-being (Bisquerra, 2011). Emotions are feelings or effects that occur when a person is in a certain state or significant interaction for the person's well-being. The development and understanding of children's emotions is a continuous and progressive process that moves from the simplest to the most complex emotions. Schools and families are the main contexts for stimulating a person's emotional development.

Emotional capacity is the force that drives us to adapt and transform our external and internal environments; it is the capacity to evolve. To achieve intelligent behavior in terms of emotion, we need perception, knowledge, and assimilation of the emotional world, practicing strategies to manage our own emotions and those of others with a foundation and standardization in evaluation. "The foundation of emotional education is acquired at home, but the school's socialization environment ensures further development (Nava, 2001). The educational model that considers emotional education must perceive individuals from a comprehensive perspective, where mind and body articulate to capture and interpret the outside world. Learning, therefore, is possible in a social environment. Nurturing affectivity must be intertwined with the transmission of knowledge and the development of students' skills, without neglecting the family's collaboration as the initial educational environment. Education consists in expanding children's horizons, developing their strengths, and enriching knowledge. Education means discovering their talents. Their well-being requires looking both inward and outward. It intends to achieve happiness through a sustained effort to train the mind and develop a range of human qualities, such as inner peace, attention, and altruistic love (Robinson & Aronica, 2018). "Emotional beings are not the opposite of rational beings; they are complementary. The process of emotional education removes the obstacles that hinder the evolution and unfolding of the emotional being.

Awareness is the transformative capacity at the core of the socio-emotional education approach. Socio-emotional learning is based on the fact that the adult (the child's reference and model) has developed emotional competences to be imitated and assimilated by the child in their development scheme. To achieve this, the adult, parent, or teacher must become aware and receive training in the field of emotional competences. The context of socio-emotional education is primarily in positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and neuroscience (Bisquerra & Pérez Escoda, 2007). The 21st-century school is responsible for educating emotions. The teacher's ability to capture, understand, and regulate their students' emotions is the best indicator of emotional balance in the classroom (Fernández-Berrocal, 2022).

Education for emotional development is a new dimension of education that aims to ensure the optimal development of emotional coefficients (EQ), academic performance (IQ), mental health, and the integration of social professionals, expressed through a responsible attitude towards emotional state, reflected in resonant communication behaviors derived from individual systems of emotional intelligence values, measurable at the level of emotional skills (Șova & Parea, 2020). The perspective that children's socio-emotional development affects their entire lives has brought changes in views on children in recent years. Socio-emotional skills can be learned and developed at any age, but the advantages are greater if development strategies are applied at an early age (Trifan & Chiș, 2020). Socio-emotional skills are a concept that includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes to identify and manage emotions, care for others, act ethically and responsibly to make good decisions, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors (Elias & Moceri, 2012). Socio-emotional skills affect children's daily lives (Ellingsen et al., 2014). Children with stronger social and emotional skills can easily meet someone, participate in peer games, communicate positively with others, express themselves, communicate their desires, and protect others' boundaries as if they were their own. Therefore, it can be predicted that a child who can demonstrate such skills is more likely to have no communication problems when starting school, and their academic success will be high. Trifan and Chiș (2020) also state that these children will be able to establish long-term friendships in their future, be effective parents, find jobs, and have higher chances of being mentally and physically healthy.
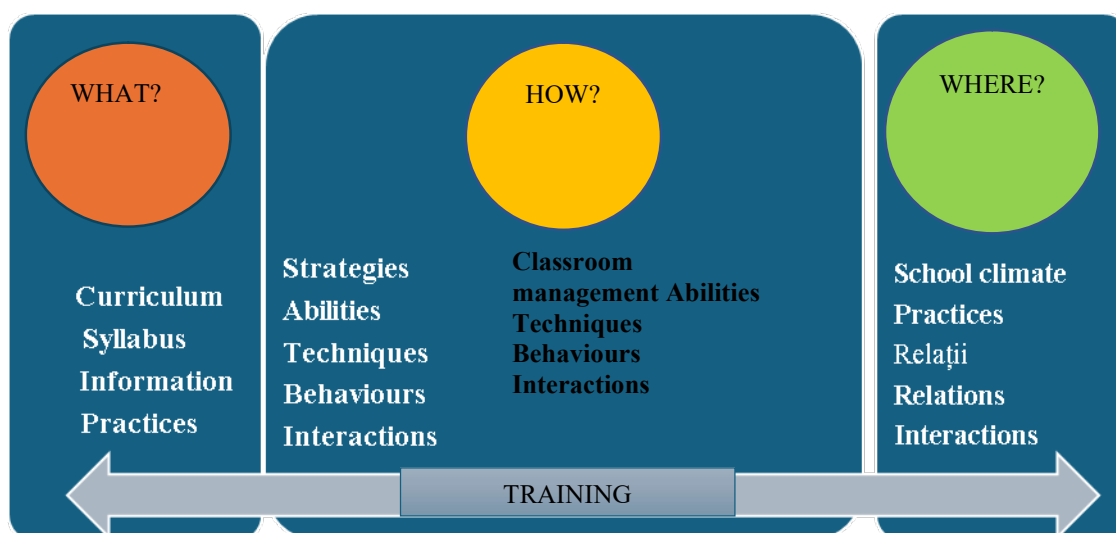


**Figure 1.** Factors that influence emotional development in class (Villasenor, 2017)

Four main elements are involved and interdependent in the development of socio-emotional skills in the classroom (see Figure 1):

- Curriculum, which establishes the content, knowledge, and competences expected for students and therefore influences the learning experience. In a specific field (vertical model), between different fields (horizontal or interdisciplinary model), or in both (mixed model), the curriculum can promote the development of socio-emotional skills. Allocating instruction time for the development of a specific skill may affect the development of other skills. However, there is evidence that non-cognitive skills may be insensitive to alternative time allocation and instructional styles.
- Pedagogical methods, which refer to the set of skills, techniques, behaviors, types of language, and interactions that teachers use to provide information, promote knowledge, teach skills, and stimulate the learning process. Specifically, this factor refers to the teaching styles of teachers.

- Classroom management, which refers to the set of skills, techniques, and behaviors that enable teachers to organize students and classroom activities. Effective teachers should demonstrate more efficient management skills.
- Classroom climate, which refers to the quality and type of school life, and depends on norms, values, interpersonal relationships, social interactions, and organizational processes and structures - a concept closely related to pedagogical methods and classroom management.

For each of these four key elements, teachers play a unique and decisive role in the socio-emotional development of their students, as the socio-emotional reference they represent in the classroom. Their ability to effectively play this role is related to their own socio-emotional skills-whether innate or acquired; their actions and behaviors in and out of the classroom as a result of these skills; their interaction with students; their ability to identify and manage social and emotional challenges in the classroom; the training they receive and the resources they have access to for improving their own socio-emotional development. Ultimately, teachers influence their students through how and what they teach, and through the way they relate to them.

Personal Development (PD) is studied as a mandatory subject in the primary cycle in the Republic of Moldova from first grade to fourth grade, while in Romania it is studied from preparatory class to second grade. The purpose of the Personal Development subject is to help students know themselves and express their interests, aptitudes, personal experiences, relationship and communication skills, as well as their reflections on what they learn. The subject primarily cultivates skills and attitudes, with the ultimate goal of increasing children's self-confidence, well-being, and preparing them for life and the future.

The aim of the study is to analyze the second-grade curriculum and auxiliary materials from Romania and the Republic of Moldova to identify the specific elements of emotional development activities as stipulated by the educational objectives and curriculum content.

**General Hypothesis 1**: At the level of the Personal Development discipline, school syllabuses pursue specific objectives related to emotional development.

**General Hypothesis 2**: For the second grade, auxiliary materials primarily contain learning tasks specific to the dimensions of emotional development in the Personal Development discipline.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Operationalization of concepts and definition of variables

To analyze the content of auxiliary materials and school syllabuses, four categories of emotional development were considered: emotion recognition, behavioral and cognitive self-regulation of emotions, interpersonal relationships, and interpersonal sensitivity.

### 2.2 Methods

The content analysis of curricular documents in pre-university education is carried out by highlighting different themes, trends, attitudes, values, and models that have a mechanism for transforming qualitative symbolic materials into quantitative materials. In this study, a variant of thematic analysis was used: categorical analysis based on grouping themes into categories and calculating their frequency. Setting the purpose and objectives of the analysis, data production, selection of analysis categories, validity and reliability of content analysis, and data interpretation are all stages of the content analysis process. The purpose of the categories is to regroup and systematize the information units identified in documents and excerpts for research.

There are two risks when establishing analysis categories. The first is to establish categories that are too simple, too narrow, or overly specific, in which the investigated reality is almost entirely encompassed (singular, insignificant themes, lost in the diversity of others, with

low frequency). The second is to establish categories that are too general, meaning too broad, encompassing too different themes. Although creating a small number of categories makes things easier for analysts, there is a risk that the information will be treated roughly. The thematic category, theme, and specification are the three elements that can be considered. The thematic category encompasses the essential elements of the discussion and is very generalizing. A thematic category contains several themes that are related to the central concept that consolidates the category. The theme is less generic than the category and is included in it. Essentially, it represents an idea, a unit of meaning, a discourse, a certain type of situation, executed through words, sentences, phrases, text, in small variations. Regardless of the variation, fluctuation, or general uniqueness of the discourse, the theme can be identified. The particular aspect of the theme, consisting of various sentences containing a theme, is called specification. In the generality of the previous elements, the specification retains only a minor but defining element. Some authors use this as a basis for other components of the analysis: establishing the main themes, eliminating categories; distributing specifications; specifying interpretations; and various remarks. Thus, the information is transposed into tables with columns containing the aforementioned elements. Therefore, the following approach to analysis is proven from the perspective of categories:

- a closed analysis (inductive approach) without predefined categories is determined gradually, as new types of information, topics, and units of meaning become available
- an open analysis (deductive approach), which involves the presence of predefined categories in which subjects and specifications are grouped;
- a mixed analysis (composite approach) that requires both the presence of predefined categories and the identification of other categories along the way.
- another mixed method is to use predefined categories and leave topics and specifications at the content level, thus the topic is determined based on content analysis.

When determining the subject and category of analysis, it is necessary to adhere to certain criteria: exclusivity, and consequently, information can only be attributed to one subject or category; integrity of the entire material content that should be classified, and the category or subject should allow the structuring of the entire material; objectivity, as categories and subjects should allow the classification of materials in such a way that they are as independent of subjectivity as possible; relevance, meaning that categories must fit the theme and content of the documents; uniformity, according to which, regardless of the analyst or category, the same criteria and principles of material classification should apply. A number of advantages are offered by the content analysis method. This includes the ability to perform both quantitative and qualitative operations; it allows statistical analysis of the coded form of text; it is a means of analyzing interactions; it provides an in-depth understanding of the complex patterns of human language and thought (Agabrian, 2006, p. 24).

### *2.3. Research procedure*

In the period of September-October 2024, we conducted a content analysis of school syllabuses and auxiliary materials in pre-university education. This study focused on examining the curricula for the subject Personal Development for the second grade, both in Romanian education and in the educational system of the Republic of Moldova.

## 3. Results

Hypothesis 1 was verified using thematic content analysis. Consequently, the themes that matched each category were identified, as well as the number of specifications of these themes for each subject in the curricular areas considered.

Şova and Parea (2020) considers that emotional competencies are divided into two categories (Figure 2).
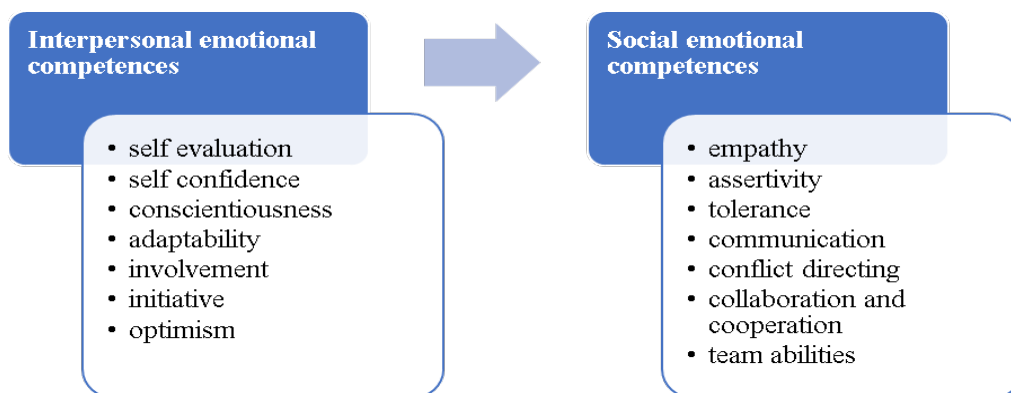
**Figure. 2** Types of emotional competences (Șova & Parea, 2020)

In Table 1, a comparative analysis is presented between the outcomes of the school syllabuses in the Romanian educational system and those in the Republic of Moldova.

**Table 1.** Analysis of school curricula in Romanian and Moldovan education for the discipline Personal Development

| Comparison Criteria | School Curriculum: Personal Development, 2nd Grade, Romania | National Curriculum, Primary Education: Personal Development, 2nd Grade, Republic of Moldova |
|---|---|---|
| **European documents** | Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on key competencies from the perspective of lifelong learning | Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on key competencies from the perspective of lifelong learning |
| **Document structure** | <ul><li>Presentation Note</li><li>General Competencies</li><li>Specific Competencies and Examples of Learning Activities</li><li>Contents</li><li>Methodological Suggestions</li></ul> | Teaching Principles<ul><li>Specific Competencies</li><li>Competency Units</li><li>Methodological Suggestions for Teaching and Learning</li></ul> |
| *Competencies* | General Competencies:<br>1. Demonstrating interest in self-knowledge and a positive attitude towards oneself and others<br>2. Appropriately expressing emotions in interactions with known children and adults<br>3. Using skills and attitudes specific to learning in a school context | Specific Competencies<br>1. Appreciating personal identity and others in educational/family/community contexts, demonstrating self-confidence and a positive attitude.<br>2. Rationally using personal, social, and environmental resources, demonstrating integrity and responsibility.<br>3. Adopting a healthy lifestyle in various contexts, showing interest and involvement in activities to maintain personal and others' health.<br>4. Designing a career from the perspective of individual potential and professional interests, demonstrating a positive attitude towards personal development and learning as the primary work of the student. |

| | | 5. Adapting behavior regarding personal and others' safety in daily situations, demonstrating attentiveness and a responsible attitude towards oneself and others. |
|---|---|---|
| **Thematic/ Content areas:** | **Content fields:**<br>1. Self-awareness and a healthy lifestyle<br>2. Emotional and social development<br>3. Specific aspects of organizing learning and preparing for life for young students | **Competency Units**:<br>1. The art of knowing oneself and others / Personal identity and harmonious relationships<br>2. Ensuring the quality of life<br>3. A healthy lifestyle<br>4. Designing a professional career and developing entrepreneurial spirit<br>5. Personal security |

The contribution of the Personal Development subject to the emotional, social, and career development of students makes it remarkable. The authenticity of learning is based on leveraging students' experiences. There is a continuous link between the thoughts and emotions of the teacher and the behavior of the students. The thematic areas of the curriculum help students discover their identity, evaluate their feelings, build healthy relationships with others (diversity), increase their motivation for school success, and explore what professions or trades they would like to practice. It is essential to consider either integrating extracurricular activities or expanding and diversifying them. The skills and attitudes acquired in Personal Development classes are transferable assets necessary for success in school, career, and life.

The emotional development of primary school students is achieved within the Personal Development subject, in the second grade, in the Republic of Moldova, through the development of the specific competency: appreciating personal identity and others in educational/ family/ community contexts, demonstrating self-confidence and a positive attitude, while in Romania it is based on the general competency: Appropriately expressing emotions in interactions with known children and adults, and the specific competency: Expressing basic emotions in varied situations.

General Hypothesis 2: For the second grade, school auxiliary materials mainly contain tasks specific to the dimensions of emotional development within the Personal Development subject.

The learning tasks characteristic of the dimensions of emotional development were extracted from the Personal Development auxiliary materials for the second grade, from Romania and the Republic of Moldova (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Learning tasks specific to emotional development in Personal Development textbooks
(2nd grade)

| Dimensions of emotional development | Personal Development auxiliary, 2nd grade (Neacșu, 2023) | Personal Development Auxiliary, 2nd grade (Tăutu, Chirchin, 2024) |
|---|---|---|
| **Recognition of emotions** | 1. What emotions do you think the children in the following images are experiencing? Draw the corresponding face. (p. 17)<br>2. Describe brief moments from your life where you experienced the following emotions. (p. 18)<br>3. We constantly experience different emotions. Imagine an emotion coming to life and becoming a story character. Create a short story where the main | 1. Look closely and say what emotion each child expresses. (p. 10)<br>2. How do you think a child feels in the following situations? (p. 10)<br>3. Draw correspondences: (p. 11)<br>4. What emotions do the characters in the stories express? (p. 11)<br>5. Draw the emotions. (p. 14) |

| | character is an emotion. (p. 18) | |
|---|---|---|
| **Behavioral and cognitive regulation of rmotions** | 1. The emotions got lost! Help them reach the people experiencing them! (p. 19)<br>2. People experience different emotions and behave according to what they feel. (p. 20)<br>3. When you say "winter," how do you feel? Describe the emotion(s). (p. 23)<br>4. Read the poem "Little Pine Tree, Sweet Pine Tree" and decorate the tree as you like! (p. 25)<br>5. Write on the clouds below things or activities that make you feel better when you are sad or upset. (p. 31) | 1. How do you control your anger? Underline what suits you. (p. 11) |
| **Interpersonal relationships** | 1. Collective activity: "Stories of Emotions." (p. 18)<br>2. Team activity: Short scenes based on images. (p. 20)<br>3. Make a list of the people you cherish. (p. 33) | 1. Case study: Respecting another's opinion (p. 11)<br>2. Write a thank-you note to a classmate who helped you when you needed it. (p. 19)<br>3. Identify the situations of correct behavior in the examples below. (p. 20)<br>4. Discuss your preferences with a partner (p. 21)<br>5. Tick the activity that illustrates teamwork (p. 21)<br>6. Interview with a family member (p. 38) |
| **Interpersonal sensitivity** | 1. Draw a symbol for Christmas. (p. 25)<br>2. All children are happy when they receive a gift. Some children are not as fortunate as you. Could you make such a child happy by giving them some of your toys you no longer play with? Draw the toy you are willing to give. (p. 26)<br>3. How do you feel when you give? (p. 26) | 1. Emotion map (p. 11)<br>2. Tick. How will you act in the following situations? (p. 51)<br>3. Draw correspondences. What kind of pain (physical or emotional) do you feel in the following situations? (p. 15) |

The analysis of the frequency of occurrence of learning tasks specific to emotional development indicates that those for recognizing emotions predominated in the Personal Development auxiliary in the Republic of Moldova, while the tasks for behavioral and cognitive regulation of emotions predominated in the Personal Development auxiliary in Romania.

Regarding the learning tasks characteristic of interpersonal relationships, it is noted that they predominated in the Personal Development auxiliary in the Republic of Moldova, while those related to interpersonal sensitivity are equally present in both auxiliaries.

**Table 3.** Analysis of the frequency of specific learning tasks

| Dimensions of Emotional Development | Frequency in the Personal Development auxiliary from Romania | Frequency in the Personal Development auxiliary from the Republic of Moldova |
|---|---|---|
| Recognition of emotions | 3 | 5 |
| Behavioral and cognitive regulation of emotions | 5 | 1 |

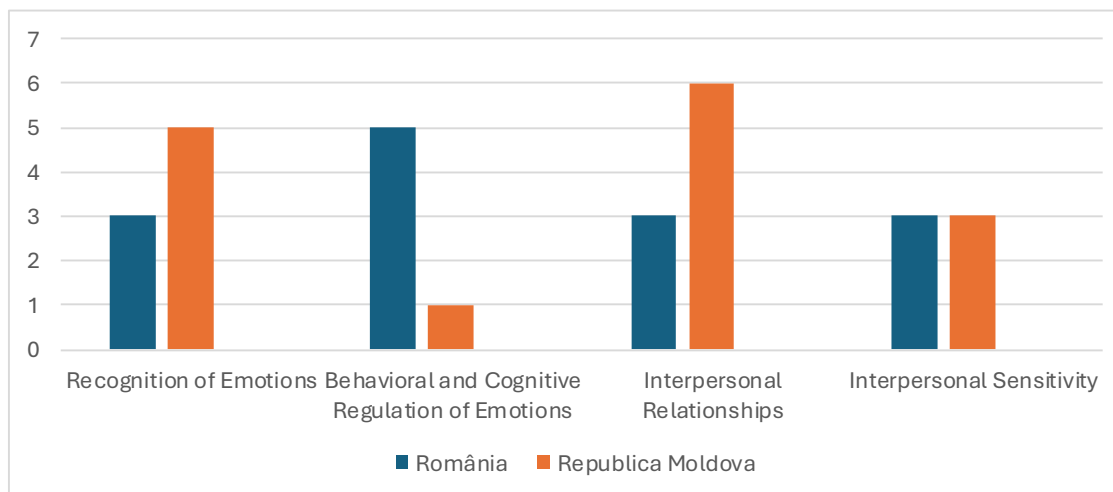| Dimensions of Emotional Development | Frequency in the Personal Development auxiliary from Romania | Frequency in the Personal Development auxiliary from the Republic of Moldova |
|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal relationships | 3 | 6 |
| Interpersonal sensitivity | 3 | 3 |



**Figure. 4.** Frequency of specific learning tasks for the dimensions of emotional development (Personal Development auxiliaries from Romania and the Republic of Moldova)

## 6. Conclusion

Education in Romania and the Republic of Moldova focuses on developing competencies. It is assumed that for individuals to develop and engage, they need competencies. These competencies aim for social inclusion, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, a successful life, community integration, and active citizenship. It has been scientifically discovered and confirmed that people develop their competencies throughout life, from early childhood to adulthood, in formal, non-formal, or informal learning contexts, in families, schools, workplaces, and communities. Thus, key competencies are defined as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, highlighting the complex nature of the European training profile for pre-university graduates. Personal Development (PD) contributes to the achievement of the training profile from the perspective of five dimensions of student personality development, the most important of which are: self-awareness competencies, socio-emotional competencies, learning management competencies, career management competencies, and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Regarding socio-emotional learning, the curriculum implemented in Romania and the Republic of Moldova draws attention to the importance of socio-emotional learning. The development of a child's social-emotional skills is accompanied by a complex and long process in which all educational factors must participate with great responsibility.

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