

DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH PLAY ACTIVITIES

Liliana TOMILINA, Doctor of Philosophy in Pedagogical Sciences

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6307-8239>

Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Primary Education

T.G. Shevchenko Pridnestrovian State University, Tiraspol

Abstract: The article addresses the issue of developing children's emotional intelligence through play activities. It reveals the significance of emotional intelligence for the formation of a child's personality, their successful socialization, and the establishment of constructive interactions with others. Special attention is given to play methods and exercises aimed at recognizing and expressing emotions, developing empathy, self-regulation, and communication skills. The article justifies the effectiveness of using play activities as a key tool for forming emotional competence. It analyzes the psychological characteristics of primary school age and proposes specific play directions for developing skills in recognizing and regulating emotions. The role of teachers and parents in creating an emotionally supportive environment is emphasized. It concludes that the systematic use of play technologies contributes to the effective development of children's emotional intelligence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, primary school students, emotions, empathy, emotional self-regulation, play exercises, play activities, emotional development, interpersonal interaction.

DEZVOLTAREA INTELIGENȚEI EMOȚIONALE A ELEVILOR DIN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL PRIMAR PRIN ACTIVITĂȚI LUDICE

Rezumat. Articolul abordează problematica dezvoltării inteligenței emoționale a copiilor prin intermediul activităților ludice. Sunt evidențiate importanța inteligenței emoționale pentru formarea personalității copilului, socializarea eficientă a acestuia și stabilirea unor interacțiuni constructive cu cei din jur. O atenție deosebită este acordată metodelor și exercițiilor ludice orientate spre recunoașterea și exprimarea emoțiilor, dezvoltarea empatiei, autoreglării emoționale și a competențelor de comunicare. Este argumentată eficiența utilizării activităților ludice ca instrument esențial pentru formarea competenței emoționale. Sunt analizate particularitățile psihologice ale vârstei școlare mici și sunt propuse direcții concrete de activități ludice pentru dezvoltarea capacității de recunoaștere și reglare a emoțiilor. Este evidențiat rolul cadrelor didactice și al părinților în crearea unui mediu favorabil dezvoltării emoționale. Se concluzionează că utilizarea sistematică a tehnologiilor ludice contribuie la dezvoltarea eficientă a inteligenței emoționale a copiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: inteligență emoțională, elevi din învățământul primar, emoții, empatie, autoreglare emoțională, exerciții ludice, activități ludice, dezvoltare emoțională, interacțiune interpersonală.

Introduction

In the modern educational process, great attention is paid not only to the intellectual development of a child but also to the formation of their emotional sphere. The ability to understand one's own feelings, recognize the emotions of others, manage one's emotional state, and build constructive relationships is an important part of successful socialization. The combination of these abilities is commonly referred to as *emotional intelligence*.

The issue of developing emotional intelligence is particularly relevant in preschool and early school age. It is during this period that a child actively learns to interact with peers and adults, express their feelings, resolve conflicts, and control their own behavior. One of the most effective means of forming emotional intelligence is through play activities.

***Emotional intelligence** is the ability of a person to be aware of and understand their own emotions, recognize the emotional states of those around them, manage their feelings, and use this knowledge for effective communication and interaction.*

In the structure of emotional intelligence, several key components can be identified:

- *emotional self-awareness* - the ability to understand and name one's own feelings;
- *self-regulation* - the ability to control emotional reactions and manage one's behavior;
- *empathy* - the ability to understand the emotional state of another person;
- *social skills* - the ability to interact with others, negotiate, and resolve conflict situations;
- *motivation* - the ability to use emotional resources to achieve set goals.

The formation of these components is especially effective when the child not only receives information but also has the opportunity to practically apply the acquired knowledge [1, 5, 6].

***Emotional intelligence (EQ)** is a type of intelligence responsible for recognizing personal emotions and the emotions of those around us, as well as managing one's own emotions.*

The importance of emotional intelligence was first articulated by American psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey in 1990. In 1995, Daniel Goleman published a book in which he presented this idea. Subsequently, Salovey and Mayer, in collaboration with David Caruso, released a new book with practical recommendations for those interested in developing their EQ.

Despite the fact that people with high IQs and analytical abilities often deny the role of emotions, *emotional reactions help individuals make rational decisions*. According to some research, about 80% of a person's success in social and personal spheres of life is determined by their level of EQ development, while only 20% is determined by IQ, which measures cognitive abilities. Thus, it can be said that emotional reactions are quite intelligent in nature [2].

Research hypothesis: It is assumed that the systematic use of specially selected play exercises will contribute to the increase of emotional intelligence levels in elementary school students, the development of the ability to recognize their own emotions, understand the emotional states of others, and interact constructively with peers.

Play as a means of developing emotional intelligence is a natural and most accessible form of activity for a child. In a play situation, children feel free, show initiative, learn to interact with each other, and have the opportunity to express various emotions.

Unlike traditional explanations, play allows a child to experience emotional situations directly. For example, a child may find themselves in the role of an offended friend, a caring parent, a fairy-tale hero, or a participant in a conflict situation. This helps them learn to view events from different perspectives and better understand the feelings of others [6].

The aim of the article: *To theoretically justify and experimentally verify the effectiveness of using play exercises for the development of emotional intelligence in elementary school students.*

Tasks:

1. *To study* the psychological and pedagogical literature on the problem of developing emotional intelligence in elementary school students.
2. *To clarify* the concept of emotional intelligence and define its main components as they apply to younger school-age children.
3. *Determine* the initial level of emotional intelligence of 4th-grade students.
4. *Develop and conduct* a set of game exercises aimed at recognizing and understanding one's own emotions and the emotions of others.
5. Check the effectiveness of the proposed set through a pedagogical experiment. Formulate practical recommendations for primary school teachers on developing students' emotional intelligence.

Methods Used

Analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature on the problem of developing emotional intelligence in primary school students; observation; conversation; diagnostic tasks; pedagogical experiment, including diagnostic, formative, and control stages; quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained results.

Particular importance is given to:

- *role-playing games* - develop empathy and interaction skills;
- *didactic games* - help recognize and name emotions;
- *communicative games* - form communication and cooperation skills;
- *simulation games* - teach to express and recognize emotional states;
- *games for emotional self-regulation* – help manage fear, anger, anxiety, and other emotions [1, 6].

The theoretical foundations of gaming activities are the principles of domestic and foreign psychological and pedagogical science regarding the role of play in the development of a child's personality. Play is viewed not only as a form of entertainment

but also as a crucial type of activity through which a child acquires social experience, develops thinking, imagination, emotional sphere, and communication skills.

The main theoretical propositions can be presented as follows:

- *Play as a means of social development.* In the process of joint play, a child learns to interact with peers, negotiate, consider the interests of others, follow rules, and resolve emerging conflicts.

- *Play as a means of emotional development.* Play situations allow a child to express various emotional states, recognize the emotions of others, and gradually master ways to manage their own emotional reactions.

- *Play as a means of developing empathy.* By performing different roles, a child has the opportunity to view situations from another person's perspective. This contributes to the formation of the ability to understand the feelings and experiences of those around them.

- *Play as a means of self-regulation formation.* Adhering to game rules requires a child to control their behavior, manage immediate desires, wait their turn, and accept both success and failure.

- *Play as a form of modeling social situations.* In play, a child can safely reproduce situations encountered in real life: friendship, conflict, help, cooperation, competition, and reconciliation [2, 4].

Over the course of eight weeks, a series of gaming exercises was conducted with 4th-grade students, aimed at developing the emotional intelligence of younger schoolchildren by forming skills in recognizing and understanding their own emotions and the emotional states of others, developing empathy, self-regulation, and constructive interaction with peers.

Objectives of the complex:

1. To teach children to recognize and name basic emotions.
2. To develop the ability to recognize and express one's own feelings.
3. To cultivate the capacity to understand another person's emotional state.
4. To foster empathy and skills of compassion.
5. To teach children to control emotional reactions in difficult situations.
6. To develop skills for positive communication and collaboration.
7. To form the ability to constructively resolve conflict situations.
8. To teach children to use words of support, sympathy, and gratitude [3, 7].

As part of the formative stage of the research, a program consisting of eight game sessions aimed at developing the main components of emotional intelligence was implemented with 4th-grade students.

Table 1. Structure of the emotional intelligence development program

N	Topic of the lesson	Main component
1.	«Introduction to the world of emotions»	Emotional awareness
2.	«What am i feeling?»	Emotional self-discovery
3.	«Why do we experience emotions?»	Awareness and expression of emotions
4.	«I understand you»	Understanding emotions
5.	«Learning to manage anger»	Empathy
6.	«How to cope with resentment and anxiety»	Emotional self-regulation
7.	«Learning to resolve conflicts»	Emotional self-regulation
8.	«We are able to understand emotions»	Consolidation of all components

Obtained results

The game-based approach allowed for modeling emotionally significant situations, discussing behavior options, and consolidating the acquired skills in practical activities.

The emotional intelligence diagnostic form consisted of ten simple questions such as: I understand when I am angry; I can say why I am sad; name emotions; I notice when my friend is sad; I can calm down if I am very angry; I can express my feelings without hurting others; I can negotiate in conflict situations; I can put myself in someone else's shoes; I can calmly accept criticism; I notice when my mood starts to worsen [8].

After the 8th session, we conducted a follow-up diagnosis using the same tasks that were used before implementing the formative program. Evaluation: 2 points – the answer is complete and emotionally correct, well-articulated; 1 point – the answer is partially correct but insufficiently justified; 0 points – the answer is absent or incorrect. High level: 16-20 points, medium level: 10-15 points; low level: 0-9 points.

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of results before and after the experiment

Level	Before the experiment (person %)	After the experiment (person %)
High	6 (24%)	13 (52%)
Medium	16 (64%)	10 (40%)
Low	3 (12%)	2 (8%)

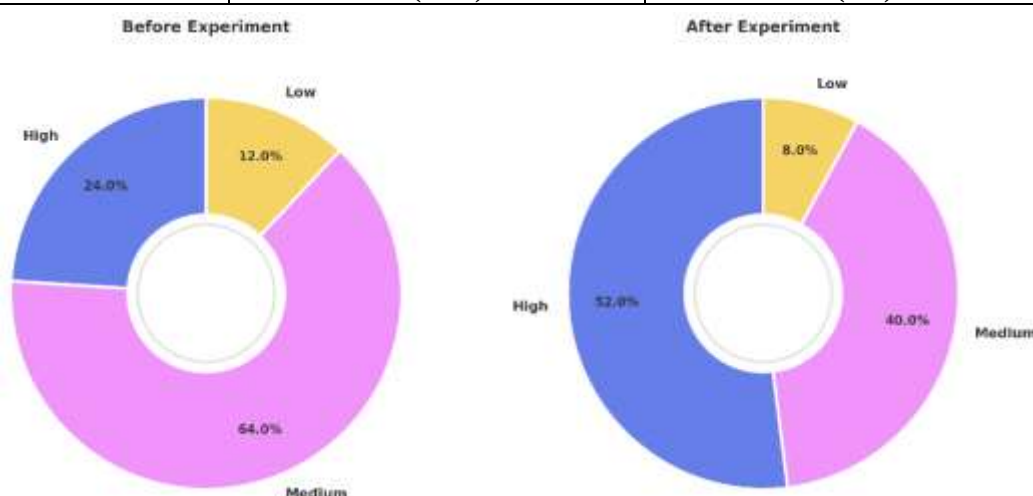


Figure 1. Distribution of 4th-grade students by levels of emotional intelligence before and after the experiment

25 students participated in the study. In the figure 1, the pie charts reflecting the dynamics of emotional intelligence development before and after the experiment.

At the initial stage of the study, it was found that a significant portion of students experienced difficulties in identifying emotional states, explaining the causes of emotions, and choosing constructive ways to behave in emotionally tense situations. The most pronounced difficulties were identified in the areas of emotional self-regulation and empathy.

During the formative stage, a set of game exercises aimed at developing emotional awareness, understanding emotions, empathy, and self-regulation skills was included in the educational process.

The results of the repeated diagnostics showed a positive trend in the emotional intelligence indicators of the students. The number of children with high and medium levels increased, while the number of students with low levels decreased. The most noticeable changes were observed in the ability to recognize emotions, understand another person's emotional state, and choose constructive ways to respond in problematic situations.

The results obtained suggest that the systematic use of game methods creates favorable conditions for the development of emotional intelligence in younger schoolchildren.

During the experiment, a distinctly positive dynamic was recorded. The number of students at the highest level more than doubled—from 24% to 52%. This occurred due to the transition of students from the medium level (which decreased by 6 students) and the low level (which decreased by 1 student). The experiment can be considered successful.

For game exercises to truly contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, it is important for the educator to adhere to several conditions:

1. It is necessary to create a safe and friendly atmosphere. The child should not be afraid to incorrectly name an emotion or express it.
2. After the game, it is advisable to conduct a brief discussion. Reflection helps the child to realize the experience gained. Questions can be asked such as: “What did you feel?”, “Why did the character act that way?”, “How could this situation have been resolved differently?”.
3. Game exercises should be appropriate for the age and individual characteristics of children. For younger schoolchildren, short, clear, and emotionally rich tasks are particularly effective.
4. Games should ideally be conducted regularly. A one-time exercise does not form a stable skill, so game elements should be systematically included in lessons, class hours, extracurricular activities, and educational work.

The teacher is not only the organizer of the games but also an example of emotionally literate behavior. The child observes how the adult reacts to mistakes, conflict situations, and emotional expressions of students.

Conclusions

Emotional intelligence is an important component of the harmonious development of a child's personality in the primary school age. The ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, manage them, consider the emotional state of others, and interact constructively with other people significantly influences the success of communication, learning, and the child's adaptation in the school environment.

The analysis of the emotional development characteristics of 4th-grade children shows that this age is a favorable period for the purposeful formation of emotional intelligence. During this period, children are already capable of realizing the reasons for their emotional states, understanding the experiences of others, and gradually mastering ways of emotional self-regulation. At the same time, some students may still face difficulties in expressing feelings, controlling negative emotions, resolving conflicts, and showing empathy.

The development of emotional intelligence should be carried out systematically and take into account the age characteristics of younger schoolchildren. The most effective methods are game exercises, discussions of emotional situations, role-playing games, elements of art therapy, and exercises for developing empathy and self-regulation.

Thus, targeted work on developing emotional intelligence in early school age contributes to the formation of emotional awareness, self-control, empathy, and constructive communication skills in children. This, in turn, creates conditions for a more favorable psychological climate in the classroom and successful social and personal development of students.

Literature

1. АКСАКАЛОВА, Ж.В. Влияние игровой деятельности на развитие эмоционального интеллекта. / Ж.В. Аксакалова, Р. Кенжебекова, Л. Мырзабек, Ж. Абдуллаева. In: *Вестник КазНПУ имени Абая*. Серия: Психология. 2026, № 86 (1). с. 148–157. DOI: 10.51889/2959-5967.2026.86.1.014.
2. ARIP, M. The effect of emotion card games on emotional intelligence among elementary school-aged children: a quasi-experimental study in Mataram, Indonesia. / M. Arip, S. Susantini, M.M. Kodi [et al.] In: *International Journal of Public Health Science*. - 2026. - Vol. 15, No. 2. - DOI: 10.11591/ijphs.v15i2.27032.
3. OLARIU, C.D. Curricular provisions in Romania and the Republic of Moldova concerning the development of emotional intelligence in primary school students.

- In: *Acta et Commentationes, Sciences of Education*. 2025. Vol. 41, No. 3. pp. 174-183. DOI: 10.36120/2587-3636.v41i3.174-183.
4. ADASKINA, A.A. Experience in Development of «The Dictionary of Emotions» Methodology for the Diagnosis of Cognitive Component of Emotional Intelligence of Primary School Children. / A.A. Adaskina, O.A. Baklykova. In: *Psychological-Educational Studies*. 2025. Vol. 17, No. 1. pp. 33-52. DOI: 10.17759/psyedu.2025170103.
 5. PAPOUTSI, C. «The Park of Emotions»: A Serious Game for the Development of Emotional Intelligence in Children. C. Papoutsi, A. Drigas, C. Skianis, C. Skordoulis, M. Pappas. In: *Applied Sciences*. 2024. Vol. 14, No. 14. 6067. DOI: 10.3390/app14146067.
 6. SANDA, O. The specifics and levels of development of emotional intelligence in primary school pupils. In: *Acta et Commentationes, Sciences of Education*. 2024. Vol. 37, No. 3. pp. 233–240. DOI: 10.36120/2587-3636.v37i3.233-240.
 7. ЗАМЯТИНА, А.В. Особенности формирования эмоционального интеллекта детей младшего школьного возраста. In: *Научные труды Московского гуманитарного университета*. 2025. № 3. ISSN 2587-8441. <https://journals.mosgu.ru/trudy/article/view/2112/2516>
 8. ДОСАЕВА, К.Х. Роль настольных игр в формировании эмоционального интеллекта у младших школьников. In: *Молодой ученый*. 2025. № 35 (586). pp. 26–29. <https://moluch.ru/archive/586/128262>

Received / Recepționat: 28.08.2026

Accepted / Acceptat: 30.09.2026

Email: liliana_72_72@mail.ru