

THE ROLE OF MOTHERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION SKILLS OF PRESCHOOLERS

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Abstract: Considering that the development of socio-emotional skills starts from early ages this paper provides an overview of current research on the strategies of socio-emotional learning, precisely emotional socialization, at home setting and its relation to the level of socioemotional development of children. The investigation is aimed to reveal what strategies of emotional socialization Azerbaijani mothers of 3-5 years aged children with different socio-economic background (education level and place of residence) apply in child rearing practice and its correlation with emotional regulation of preschooler. Overall, 115 respondents took part in the survey (50 parents from regions, 65 from Baku). Results has shown that mothers in Azerbaijan tend to use supportive strategies of emotional socialization rather than non-supportive. The most commonly-used strategy was problem solving and emotional focused reaction, and least frequently used strategy – punitive strategy. There was also significant correlation between social-emotional learning (SEL) and the development child's emotional regulation and emotional lability skills.

Keywords: preschool, emotions, emotional regulation, emotional lability, socialization strategies, parenting

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MƏKTƏBƏQƏDƏR YAŞLI UŞAQLARIN EMOSİONAL BACARIQLARININ İNKİŞAFINDA VALİDEYNLƏRİN ROLU

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Annotasiya. Məqalədə sosial-emosional bacarıqların inkişafının erkən yaşlardan başladığını nəzərə alaraq, evdə sosial-emosional öyrənmə strategiyaları, dəqiq emosional sosiallaşma və bunun uşaqların sosial-emosional inkişaf səviyyəsi ilə bağlı tədqiqatların icmalı verilmişdir. Tədqiqat müxtəlif sosial-iqtisadi mənsubiyyətə (təhsil səviyyəsi və yaşayış yeri) malik 3-5 yaşlı uşaqların tərbiyə olunmasında Azərbaycan analarının hansı emosional sosiallaşma strategiyalarını tətbiq etdiyini və bunun məktəbəqədər yaşlı uşağın emosional tənzimlənməsi ilə əlaqəsini aşkar etmək məqsədi daşıyır. Ümumilikdə, sorğuda 115 respondent iştirak edib (50 nəfər valideyn ətraf rayonlardan, 65 nəfər isə Bakıdan). Nəticələr göstərdi ki, Azərbaycanda analar dəstəkləyici deyil, emosional sosiallaşmanın dəstəkləyici strategiyalarından istifadə edirlər. Ən çox istifadə edilən strategiya problemin həlli və emosional fokuslanmış reaksiya, ən az istifadə edilən strategiya isə cəza strategiyası idi. SEL (Sosial emosional öyrənmə) ilə inkişaf edən uşağın emosional tənzimlənməsi və emosional labillik bacarıqları arasında da əhəmiyyətli korrelyasiya vardır.

Açar sözlər: məktəbəqədər, emosiyalar, emosional tənzimləmə, emosional labillik, sosiallaşma strategiyaları, valideynlik.

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Introduction \ Giriş

The dramatic changes in a view of importance of socio-emotional skills in forecasting of academic, work-related achievement and personal well-being has taken place in recent years. If traditional perspective was predominantly based on investigating general intelligence (cognitive skills) as main predictor of individual's academic success and further life outcomes, nowadays there is a significance shift toward investigating of socio-emotional skills. As it was highlighted in the report of World Economic Summit 2016 according to current trends in labor market there is an evident change in demand for core work-related skills and today the importance of cognitive abilities is understated by social and emotional skills. [Schwab, K., & Samans, R., 2016]. Study conducted by Daniel Goleman [2006], also shows that social and emotional intelligence is far more important for future success than general intelligence. The author states that: "...If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you cannot have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far" [as cited in Serrat, 2017 p. 330]. Since the growing importance of socio-emotional skills in human life has been acknowledged among scholars, majority of researchers are tend to separate it from general intelligence and examine socio-emotional intelligence as self-reliant concept of individual differences, overshadowing classical psychological concepts such as personality and IQ. [Mayer & Salovey, 1997, Salovey and Crewal, 2005, Thorndike and Stein, 1937, Walker & Foley, 1973].

Main part \ Əsas hissə

According to four-branch model social-emotional intelligence is a set of abilities, that includes managing emotions, understanding emotions, facilitating through using emotions and perceiving emotions. Each branch involves a set of skills and proceeds developmentally from basic one to more challenging ones. [Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2016]. People with high level of socio-emotional intelligence can understand own and other's emotions, manage/ regulate them, communicate about emotions, show empathy toward others, demonstrate collaborative skills, build positive interactions with others, resolve and avoid conflicts, establish and maintain positive relationship with others.

Development of socio-emotional skills in preschool age

It has already proved that development of socio-emotional skills starts from early ages, but the preschool age is particularly noteworthy for substantial gains in emotional understanding and regulating. At the ages between 3 and 5 children increasingly show that they understand that certain types of situations can induce certain emotions, some facial cues are sign of particular emotions, and emotional state can impact one's and own behavior. [Cole, P. M., Dennis, T. A., Smith-Simon, K. E., & Cohen, L. H., 2009]. Between 3-5 age children proceed from mainly coregulatory strategy (controlled by adults) to self-regulatory strategy [self-controlled]. Preschool-aged children are able to use a wide range of self-regulatory strategies, such as attention disengagement (thinking about other things), behavioral disengagement (doing something else), problem-solving (finding and applying a solution to a problem), or cognitive reappraisal (reinterpreting a given situation). Along with it, studies show that development of children's emotional self-regulatory strategies are related to parent's childrearing practices, so called, *maternal* emotion socialization strategies (supportiveness and structuring in response to child distress). [Cole et al., 2003].

Strategies of emotional socialization.

In early years the quality of parent-child relationships set the foundation for later socio-emotional development of children and supportive socialization strategies maps onto child's appropriate emotional regulation abilities, whereas non-supportive strategies can cause a risk for difficulties in later social functioning and emotional well-being. According to Ştefan [2018] applying wrong strategies of socio-emotional learning can cause delays in its development and in further ages these children are more likely to exhibit externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems.

Due to Eisenberg & Fabes [1994] there are several types of mothers' reactions to children's negative emotions, so called strategies of responding to child's negative emotional state. They are:

- 1) Distress Reactions (DR) - degree to which parents experience distress when children express negative affect.
- 2) Punitive Reactions (PR) - degree to which parents respond with punitive reactions that decrease their exposure or need to deal with the negative emotions of their children
- 3) Minimization Reactions (MR)- the degree to which parents minimize the seriousness of the situation or devalue the child's problem or distressful reaction. [Eisenberg, Spinrad, 1998]
- 4) Expressive Encouragement (EE)- the degree to which parents encourage children to express negative affect or the degree to which they validate

- child's negative emotional states (i.e., "it's ok to feel sad.")
- 5) Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR) - degree to which parents respond with strategies that are designed to help the child feel better [i.e., oriented towards affecting the child's negative feelings].
 - 6) Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR) - the degree to which parents help the child solve the problem that caused the child's distress (i.e., oriented towards helping the child solve his/her problem or coping with a stressor).

If the first three reactions are accepted as negative (non-supportive) strategies of emotional socialization, that delay the developmental process, the others are the positive (supportive) strategies, that endorse child's socio-emotional development. For instance, parents, who supportively react to children's negative emotions are actually increasing the probability of applying adaptive self-regulatory strategies by children as well. But if parents are mostly tended to use negative strategies of emotional socialization, such as, punitive or minimization strategies, they increase the risk of using negative strategies of self-regulation by their children and subsequently leading to "Externalizing Behavior Problems" at further ages. (Pereira, Santos, & Marques, C. 2022)

Mother's socio-economic background and emotional socialization strategies.

Low socio-economic status (e.g., parent's educational attainment, family's income levels) is a well-established risk for adverse child early childhood experience and consequently mental health problems at further ages. Research works shows that children from low social-economic status families are more likely to receive negative parental support and to be exposed to environmental stressors such as pollution, financial insecurity, and unsafe neighborhoods [Guhn, Emerson, Mahdavian, & Gadermann, 2020]. Such negative life conditions can give a rise to severe developmental outcomes, such as delays in children's cognitive abilities and social-emotional development. For instance, according to the results of large-scale Millennium Cohort Study in England preschool-aged children from high-income families outperform their peers from low-income families (families living below the poverty line) in the level of Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) and personal, socio-emotional development (PSE). (Hartas, 2008) In addition, current research revealed that the mother's education level is also main predictor of children developmental outcomes. According to results, children of educated mothers significantly exceed their peers, whose mothers had no educational qualifications, in CLL and PSE. The difference between developmental outcomes of children of educated and un-educated mothers was indicated on average about 6 months. [Hartas. 2011] Results of this study were in line with Millennium Cohort Study (2001-2008), which established that 3 years old children from disadvantage socio-economic background were less likely to

demonstrate advanced cognitive skills and had higher risks for externalizing and internalizing behavior difficulties [Kiernan and Huerta., 2008].

Comparative analyses of research findings also showed that there is strong distinguish in effect size between two main predictors of early development-family's income and maternal education level. According to the results, maternal education is having a stronger effect on development of socio-emotional competences, than financial status of family. [Hartas., 2011]. It is obvious, cause even in poor families, educated mother can be more resourceful in child CLL and PSE and development through providing child with cognitively stimulating home learning environment and applying supportive social-emotional learning strategies in daily-life parent-child relationship.

Taking into account the importance of socio-emotional development of children and the role of mother's reactions to child's negative emotional state the aim of our research was to reveal the strategies, that are predominantly used by mothers with different socio-economic background in Azerbaijan and how it is correlated with their child's emotional regulation and emotional lability/negativity skills.

To date, large body of empirical research studies in the field of child development and learning had been conducted in Azerbaijan. But the majority of them are focused predominantly on investigation of cognition process, rather than socio-emotional issues. Moreover, there is no research dedicated to studying these concepts during preschool age and investigating socio-emotional learning strategies used by mothers from rural areas of Azerbaijan. Taking into account the annual statistical report of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as of 2023, only 51.4% of children in Azerbaijan are involved in preschool education. It is worth mentioning that this data also includes children who attend a school readiness program at the age of 5, which lasts only one year. This indicates that enrolment rate of children between one and five years old remains as low as 1 in 4. [UNICEF, 2018]. Thus, become the primary individuals responsible for the socio-emotional development of their child from birth to age 5 [State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan., 2023].

Methodology

The current research work is aimed to examine what strategies of emotional socialization of preschool aged children parents with different socio-economic background apply in their rearing practice and also to reveal the correlation between each strategy of SEL and level of socioemotional development of a child. The data collection was done through online self-reported surveys. Due to cultur-

al norms, in Azerbaijan the primarily responsible for child rearing are mothers. Considering that the current research was conducted among mothers.

Hypothesis of the research is:

1. Mothers from rural areas of Azerbaijan and mothers with lower levels of education tend to use negative strategies of socio-emotional learning at home, such as “punitive – using verbal and physical punishment to control the expression of negative emotion and “distress”- becoming adversely aroused/distressed by child’s negative emotion”.
2. Strategies of emotional socialization is correlating with child’s emotion regulation and emotional lability/negativity competences. More precisely, positive [supportive] strategies are linked with emotional regulation, whilst negative [non-supportive strategies] with emotional lability/negativity.

Sampling: The current study engaged 115 parents of preschool-aged children from both rural (50) and urban (50) areas of Azerbaijan. The sample was built using the snowball method. Mothers from urban areas are parents whose children attend ‘Community-based preschool education centers,’ which is an alternative model of preschool education in Azerbaijan aimed at engaging disadvantaged children aged 3-5 from rural areas in preschool education. More detailed description is given in the Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group		
<i>Variables</i>		N
Age	18-25	22
	26-35	66
	36-50	22
	51 and elder	5
Place of residence	Urban	65
	Rural	50
Education Level	Secondary education (11 years)	35
	Post-secondary education (including technical college and higher education	80

Instrumentation: The data about children’s socioemotional development derived from parent’s reports on survey. In the current study, 2 questionnaires were used that had already been designed and used in different related studies

1. *Coping with Children’s Negative Emotions Scale -Parent form (Eisen-*

- berg, Cumberland & Spinrad) – The questioner was designed in order to measure the degree to which parents perceive themselves as reactive to young children’s negative affect in distressful situations [Cruz, Alves, Soares & Barbosa-Ducharne., 2017]
2. *Emotion Regulation Checklist (Shields and Cicchetti)* is an instrument for the measurement of the level of emotion regulation of children by means of two scales, Emotion Regulation (ER] and Emotional Lability/Negativity [L/N] [Reis, Oliveira, Bandeira, Andrade, Abreu & Sperb., 2016]

Findings

The most commonly applied strategy of SEL. Place of residence and SEL strategies

According to the results (see table 2) regardless place of residence (urban or rural areas) majority of Azerbaijani mothers are tend to use positive strategies of emotional socialization. The most commonly used supportive strategy of SEL is Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR)- discussing with children the ways how to solve the problem in order to regulate arousal of negative emotional state. Simultaneously, among negative strategies of SEL Azerbaijani mothers apply predominantly minimization strategy- ignoring (underestimating) negative emotional state of children. Taking into account, minimization is considered as mostly neural strategy than negative strategy, the risk of inducing of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems is low.

Table 2. Median of supportive and non-supportive strategies by place of residence				
Place of residence	SEL strategy	N	M	SD
Urban	Distress Reactions (DR	65	3	0.8281
	Punitive Reactions (PR).	65	2.25	1.26836
	Expressive Encouragement (EE).	65	3.5	1.48572
	Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR).	65	5.62	1.33556
	Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR).	65	5.85	1.44408
	Minimization Reactions (MR).	65	4	1.38079
	Supportive	65	15.1	3.38821
	Non-supportive	65	9.33	2.7254
Rural	Distress Reactions (DR	50	3.04	0.744

	Punitive Reactions (PR).	50	2.5	1.04021
	Expressive Encouragement (EE).	50	4.21	1.31241
	Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR).	50	5.54	1.18118
	Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR).	50	5.885	1.23161
	Minimization Reactions (MR).	50	4.335	1.25752
	Supportive	50	15.995	3.84049
	Non-supportive	50	9.71	2.59249

Additionally, Manna-Witney analysis (see *Table 3.*) shows that, there is not statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in strategies of emotional socialization, applied by mothers from rural and urban areas.

Table. 3 Differences in mothers' supportive and non-supportive emotion socialization strategies by Place of Residence: the Results of the Mann-Whitney U-Test						
		<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Total Ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Distress Reactions (DR).		Urban	55.31	55.31	1450	0.323
	Rural	61.5	61.5			
Punitive Reactions (PR).		Urban	55.28	55.28	1448	0.318
	Rural	61.54	61.54			
Expressive Encouragement (EE).		Urban	54.73	54.73	1412.5	0.23
	Rural	62.25	62.25			
Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR).		Urban	57.05	57.05	1563	0.726
	Rural	59.24	59.24			
Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR).		Urban	57.68	57.68	1604	0.906
	Rural	58.42	58.42			
Minimization Reactions (MR).		Urban	57.22	57.22	1574	0.773
	Rural	59.02	59.02			
Supportive		Urban	54.3	54.3	1384.5	0.175
	Rural	62.81	62.81			
Non-supportive		Urban	57.82	57.82	1613.5	0.948
	Rural	58.23	58.23			

Note. n=115						
* p< 0,05, two-tailed.						
** p< 0,01, two-tailed.						

Maternal Emotion Socialization Behaviors and Education Level

In contrast with our hypothesis (see table 4) there is not statistically significant differences across emotion socialization strategies and mother’s education level ($p>0.05$). It means that, the strategies of socio-emotional learning don’t vary by level of maternal education within our sample.

Table. 4 Manna-Whitney U- Test’s Results of Maternal Emotion Socialization Behaviors According to Mothers’ Education Level						
Maternal Emotion Socialization strategies		Mothers’ Education Level	Mean rank	Total Ranks	U	p
Distress Reactions (DR)		Secondary education	62.78	3453	1387	0.141
	Post-secondary education	53.62	3217			
Punitive Reactions (PR).		Secondary education	63.96	3518	1322	0.066
	Post-secondary education	52.53	3152			
Expressive Encouragement (EE).		Secondary education	61.44	3379	1461	0.29
	Post-secondary education	54.85	3291			
Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR).		Secondary education	59	3245	1595	0.758
	Post-secondary education	57.08	3425			
Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR).		Secondary education	60.39	3321.5	1518.5	0.461
	Post-secondary education	55.81	3348.5			

Aydan Azimzade. **The role of mothers in the development of emotional regulation skills of preschoolers**

Minimization Reactions (MR).		Secondary education	62.74	3450.5		
	Post-secondary education	53.66	3219.5		1389.5	0.145
Supportive		Secondary education	56.55	3110.5		
	Post-secondary education	59.33	3559.5		1570.5	0.656
Non-supportive		Secondary education	56.75	3121.5		
	Post-secondary education	59.14	3548.5		1581.5	0.701
Note. n=115						
* p< 0,05, two-tailed.						
** p< 0,01, two-tailed.						

Bivariate Correlations Between All Study Variables (Spearman correlation)

According to the Table 5. Child's emotional lability and negativity scores correlated significantly with three variables: emotional regulation (children, who can better regulate their emotion are less like to show emotional lability and negativity), distress reaction and problem- focused reactions (if parents (mothers) experience distress when children express negative affect or don't help (guide) the child solve the problem that caused the child's distress, their children cannot deal with negative emotions and tend to have external or internal behavior problems). Child's Emotional Regulation ability is also significantly correlated with distress reaction (negative correlation) and emotion focused strategies of SEL, that means if parents help the child feel better in distress situation, their child are mostly able to regulate and manage their emotion. Based on the results we can claim that our second hypothesis is proved. Negative strategies are predominantly correlated with emotional lability, and positive strategies with emotional regularity. Also, there is a link between positive strategies and emotional lability and vise-versa, but correlation direction is negative.

Table 5. Correlations, means, and standard deviations of key study variables									
	M (SD) 1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Liability/ Negativity	31.87 (7.1)	1	-.18*	.19*	0.05	0.01	-0.12	-.19*	-0.0
2. Emotion_ Regulation	31.0 (4.71)		1	-.39**	-0.02	0.17	.37**	.34**	.20*
3. Distress Reactions (DR)	2.95 (0.79)			1	.45**	-0.04	-.20*	-.23*	0.1
4. Punitive Reactions (PR).	2.73 (1.17)				1	.31**	.21*	.20*	.56**
5. Expressive Encourage- ment (EE).	3.76 (1.41)					1	.47**	.50**	.45**
6. Emo- tion-Focused Reactions (EFR).	5.17 (1.26)						1	.75**	.56**
7. Prob- lem-Focused Reactions (PFR).	5.44 (1.35)							1	.52**
8. Minimize- tion Reac- tions (MR).	4.14 (1.32)								1
Note. n=115									
* p< 0,05, two-tailed.									
** p< 0,01, two-tailed.									

Discussion and Conclusion

The current research work was aimed to reveal what strategies of SEL do mothers of preschool aged children with different socio-economic background of Azerbaijan apply in their daily life child-parent relationship. In line with our finding, in general Azerbaijani mothers tend to use more supportive strategies of emotional socialization rather than non-supportive strategies. More precisely, parents frequently use “Problem solving” and “Emotion-focused” reaction as positive strategies of SEL, whilst among negative strategies most commonly applied strategies are “Minimization” and “Distress reaction”. These results mean that mothers give priority on either engaging in finding alternative ways of solving problems that evoke negative emotions or talking with their children in order to help the them feel better. Despite this, they are also less inclined to encourage children to express their negative emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, etc. As is clear, applying the Expressive Encouragement (EE) strategy helps children understand that all emotions, even negative ones, are equally important and should be expressed in order to reduce negative emotional states. In addition, through expressiveness children learn to identify facial cues of different emotional states. In essence, emotional expressiveness is an essential competence, that is a part of emotional recognition ability [Denham, 2006]. Due to Ştefan [2018], preschool aged children who have difficulties in recognizing their own emotions as well as other’s emotions are more likely to have difficulties in accurately decoding emotional cues. These emotional competences are especially important in daily-life social interaction because wrong decoding of facial expressions of emotions, for instance, anger instead of sadness, could lead wrong interpretation of child’s intentions. Improved ability of emotions recognition can also predict child’s ability to manage emotions. In contrast, children who are less accurate in detecting emotions are likely to act negatively, that can cause social adjustment problems among classmates. Thus, suppressing expression of negative emotion can give a ground to the delays in development of emotional expressiveness skills, and consequently problems in social interaction with other at further ages.

In addition, according to the findings, our parents noted that they avoid using punitive reaction to child’s negative emotional state, that undoubtedly endorse socio-emotional development of children. Taking into account, that at preschool age children proceed from coregulatory strategies to self-regulatory strategies avoiding punitive strategies and practicing positive strategies, such as emotion-focused reactions and problem focused reactions can lead to shaping emotional regulation skills, that are crucial in for further life outcomes.

The surprising finding was obtained in analyzing differences in strategies of SEL and mothers socio-economic background (place of residence and education level. Contrary to our expectations, the study has shown that there are no statistically significant differences in emotional socialization strategies applied by mothers with secondary and post-secondary education. These results contradict prevailing opinion of direct impact of demographics on SEL strategies. But in our view, the reason for this contradiction is the limitation of our sample. So, the survey was conducted among mothers, whose children attend project “Community-based preschool education centers”. As it is known, along with enhancing the engagement of preschooler in early education, the aim of this project is to provide mothers with essential knowledges and skills regarding early childhood development issue. So, our participants were parents, who had taken a part in early education classes, involved in teaching practice along with teacher, engaged in different trainings on early childhood development [Rasulova, 2020]. Moreover, and probably the most important part of parent education is they had a chance to observe right child-elder social interaction on teacher-child communication example. During observation they observed how specially educated teachers deal with children negative emotional state and how they react and support them, that in our view is valuable experience for parents. From this perspective, these results are in compliance with Hartas [2011] view, who claims that income alone is not enough to reduce socio-economic inequalities and socio-emotional development of children. The only way of eliminating social inequalities is implementing programs of increasing parent’s awareness and capabilities about early development through providing an access to education and trainings. These findings open new perspective for further comparative research that can be designed to investigate SEL among parents, whose children does not attend any education or training programs and those who do.

Research Limitations

The main limitation of the study is its size and scope. Due to difficulties in accessing parents from rural areas for in-person interviews, the current research was conducted using an online questionnaire. This may lead to issues with representativeness, as not everyone in the country, especially in rural areas, has access to the internet. In this context, incorporating more data could enhance the potential for generalizability of results and increase the representativeness of the research. However, despite these aforementioned limitations, this study aims to emphasize the need for further research and lay the groundwork for more comprehensive research by incorporating qualitative methods in the future.

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